

**ASPECTS OF BALKAN ISLAMISATION
IN THE LIGHT OF PETITIONS FOR CONVERSION
(KISVE BAHASI ARZUHALS)
(1670-1750)**

A THESIS PRESENTED

BY

NIKOLAY ANTOV

TO

**THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY**

BILKENT UNIVERSITY

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I certify that I have read this thesis and in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of History.

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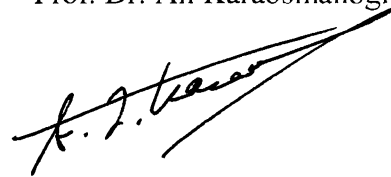


Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
 Chapter 1: Historical Overview (1670-1750)	8
 Chapter 2: Sources.....	17
 Chapter 3: Factors Conditioning Conversion, Patterns of Motivation.....	27
3.1 Introduction.....	27
3.2 Fiscal pressure.....	29
3.3 Social Advancement.....	37
3.4 Religious Influences.....	45
 Chapter 4: After Conversion. Post-conversion Practices and Attitudes.....	53
 Conclusion.....	58
 Bibliography.....	61
 Appendix.....	66

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Abstract

This work takes up the task to present and discuss in more detail certain aspects of Islamisation in the Ottoman Balkans that have been left unsatisfactorily studied up to now. Utilising petitions for conversion to Islam (*kisve bahasi arzuhals*) in combination with other supporting primary sources, it is meant to cast more light upon the actual mechanisms of conversion, patterns of motivation, as well as the possible factors that conditioned the process of Islamisation in the Ottoman Balkans during the late 17th and the first half of the 18th cc. and to show that at least in the light of these documents Balkan Islamisation during the period in question was a gradual process influenced by a complex set of factors, whereby fiscal pressure and the quest for social advancement played a prominent role. Lastly, post-conversion socio-religious practices as well as the multifaceted attitude of the Ottoman state and Islamic legal tradition towards “new Muslims” will be discussed.

Introduction

Islamisation processes in the Balkans have quite naturally attracted the attention of historians from the Balkans and the world over. A natural explanation for this interest is to be found in the fact that the Ottoman-Turkic colonization, the penetration and spread of Islam, and conversion in particular, apart from being important aspects of the demographic and religious history of the Ottoman Balkans, are also an indispensable part of the Balkan peoples' lasting historical memories. As of today, there exist numerically considerable Muslim minorities – Slavic and Turkish speaking alike – and their ethnogenesis continues to be a subject of heated debates and numerous hypotheses. Research work on this problematics has often been negatively affected by the fact that the explanation of Islamisation processes in the region has most of the time been directly related to the formation of national identities and national state doctrines in the newly formed Balkan nation-states at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries; research on the topic has also been used to serve the general political interests or to justify concrete policies pursued by dictatorial (communist) regimes that prevailed over most of the Balkans during the second half of the 20th century.

Thus, a great portion of the works devoted to Balkan Islamisation (especially those written by historians from the Balkans) have been the product of what E. Radushev has termed as “the national revivalist – mythological approach” which renders Balkan Islamisation as forcible mass conversion of Balkan Christian population accompanied by state coordinated severe punitive campaigns. This approach has appeared “effective” as it provided easily understandable and acceptable

explanations in the context of the notions of Ottoman domination, already established in the local folklore tradition and national revivalist historiography.¹

Local Balkan historians have most often been concerned with the historical consequences of Islamisation and conversion, the “negative” role the latter played in the development of the Balkan peoples and the respective demographic changes they have brought about as a final result. The spread of Islam has often been linked to the arrest of the spiritual development and the relatively late formation of the national consciousness of the local Balkan peoples, and even to the Balkan countries’ considerable lag in respect to economic development as compared to those of Central and Western Europe. The natural syncretism of the various cultural influences which coexisted in the Ottoman Balkans for centuries on end have posed additional problems to historians, and especially to those who have approached Balkan Islamisation with politically presupposed conclusions in mind.

The most recent manifestation of historical research and writing’s being manipulated for the purpose of justifying extreme political measures, was the so called “revival process” in Bulgaria between 1984 and 1989. Under extreme political pressure on behalf of Bulgaria’s communist regime, the efforts of a host of Bulgarian orientalist were geared on the propounding of rather implausible explanations of the existence of Bulgaria’s Muslim minorities, Slavic and Turkish speaking alike. Untenable theories ranged from presenting Bulgarian Turks as “Turkic speaking Muslim Bulgarians” (sic) whose historical roots lay in pre-Ottoman developments, to rendering the existence of Bulgaria’s Muslim communities as a result of coordinated

¹ E. Radushev, “Demografski I etno-religiozni protsesi v zapadnite Rodopi prez 15-18ti vek” (Demographic and Ethno-religious Processes in the Western Rodhopes during 15-18th centuries), *Istorichsko Badeshte*, 1998, No. 1, Sofia.

assimilation policies on behalf of the Ottoman state, which, being viewed as “a mistake of history”, called for an apposite redress.²

Be it as it may, the specifics and functional nature of Islamisation in the different regions of the Balkans and during the different periods of Ottoman rule have been unsatisfactorily studied. Antonina Zheliazkova has provided us with the only existing study, that has attempted to address Balkan Islamisation on a large scale.³ Beside presenting a broad picture of the process of Islamisation in the Western Balkan lands, Zheliazkova’s study is the first and only one that has utilized petitions (*arzuahals*) for conversion to Islam in a scholarly and objective manner.⁴ Still, given the nature of her work, A. Zheliazkova did not study and analyze this type of documents in detail, but only used them to present a broad picture of Balkan Islamisation, together with a large number of other documents, without discussing sufficiently the motivation patterns which the *arzuahals* disclose, and making virtually no attempt to link them to the problems of conversion and apostacy in the light of Islamic legal tradition. A circumstance that objectively limited the scope of analysis of this work is that, although published in 1990, it was also written in Bulgaria during the years of the “revival process”, when access to certain archival units and secondary literature was limited, and censorship (and even more importantly, autocensorship) exerted a great deal of pressure upon a historian’s state of mind.

² See Dimitrov, S., “Nyakoi problemi na etnicheskite i islyamizatsionno-asimilatsionnite protsesi v Balgarskite zemi prez XV-XVII v.”, *Problemi na Balgarskata narodnost I natsia*, No. 3, Sofia, 1987, pp. 33-56.

³ Zheliazkova, A., *Razprostranenie na Islyama v Zapadnobalkanskite Zemi pod Osmanska Vlast, XV-XVIII vek*, (The Spread of Islam in the Western Balkan Lands under Ottoman Rule, 15th –18th Centuries), Sofia: BAN, 1990.

⁴ In fact, the first scholarly work in which such petitions were brought to attention is Asparuh Velkov and Evgeni Radushev’s article “Osmanski Arhivni darzhavni Dokumenti za Islyamizatsionnite Protsesi na Balkanite, XIV – XIX v.”, in *Problemi na Razvitiето na Balgarskata Narodnost I Natsia*, No. 3, Sofia, 1987, pp., 57-73. This article, however, was meant to serve the political objectives set by the Bulgarian communist regime in relation to the “revival process”, and did not do much more than presenting the above mentioned petitions as “one more proof of the coercive assimilation policies of the Ottoman state”.

In addition to A. Zheliazkova's work, there exist a few studies devoted particularly to Balkan Islamisation. Two names that readily come to mind in this respect are those of Machiel Kiel and Strashimir Dimitrov. Both have produced valuable studies dealing with Islamisation in geographically limited regions in Ottoman Bulgaria. M. Kiel studied ethno-religious processes in the *kazas* of Selvi (modern Sevlievo, in North Central Bulgaria) and Nevrekob (modern Nevrokop, Southwestern Bulgaria), while S. Dimitrov dealt with the Mesta valley (Western Rodhopes).⁵ Both authors have based their studies on Ottoman fiscal registers (*tahrir*, *cizye*, and *avariz defterleri*) and have generally reached similar conclusions -- namely that Islamisation in the respective regions they studied was a gradual process, and not one related to forced mass conversion. Both studies were prepared with the aim to establish exactly whether this was true or not, and especially as M. Kiel's work is concerned, it was meant to be an attack against nationalistic Bulgarian historiography of the period of the Revival process. However, although both articles are of very high scholarly value, they do not provide us with much insights with regard to the actual mechanisms of Islamisation. Ottoman fiscal registers may provide a fairly reliable picture of demographic and ethno-religious changes, but they can hardly help to explain them.

Besides, Ottomanists from the Balkans, Turkey, and the world over, have presented us with a considerable number of works that touch upon various historical processes and phenomena, which relate to Islamisation in one way or another. Eminent Turkish historians, such as Ö. L. Barkan, I. H. Uzunçarşılı, M. T. Gökbigin,

⁵ Kiel, Machiel, *Razprostranenie na Islyama v balgarskoto selo rpez Osmanskata epoha (XV-XVIII v.), kolonizatsiya i islyamizatsiya*, Sofia: IMIR, 1998, pp. 56-126, Strashimir Dimitrov, "Demografskite otnosheniya i pronikvaneto na Islyama va Zapadnite Rodopi I dolinata na reka Mesta prez XV-XVII v.", *Rodopski Sbornik*, vol. 1, Sofia, 1965, see also Kiel, M., "Urban Development in Bulgaria in the Turkish Period", Karpal, Kemal, ed., *the Turks of Bulgaria. The History, Culture, and Political Life of a Minority*, Istanbul, 1990, pp.79-158.

and H. Inalcik have achieved a lot in casting more light upon the demographic changes that took place in the Ottoman Balkans. In a way, however, they have underestimated the extent and importance of individual and small group conversion to Islam on behalf of the local Balkan population, and have placed excessive emphasis on the role of Turkic colonization as conditioned by Ottoman centralism.⁶

The same prominent Turkish scholars, together with a number of historians from the Balkans, such as V. Mutafovchieva, B. Cvetkova, M. Sokoloski, A. Matkovski, A. Suceasa, N. Filipovic, H. Sabanovic, and D. Bojanic-Lukac, to mention just but a few, have exerted considerable efforts in establishing and clarifying the major features of the Ottoman agrarian regime during the first centuries of Ottoman rule in the Balkans.⁷ Unlike the classical age, the 17th and 18th centuries have been insufficiently researched. Among the few important contributions in respect to Ottoman socio-economic history are those of E. Radushev, M. Akdağ, and Y. Özkaya.⁸

Among the more specific issues that relate to the process of Islamisation in the Ottoman Balkans are the collection of *cizye*, cryptochristianity, and conversion and apostasy as viewed by the Ottoman state, and in the context of Islamic legal tradition.

Although, *cizye* and its collection occupied a substantial place in the non-Muslims' fiscal burden and were a considerable source of income for the imperial treasury, few studies have been exclusively devoted to this problem.⁹

⁶ A noteworthy example in this respect is Ö. L. Barkan's article "Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda bir iskan ve kolonizasyon metodu olarak sürgünler", *İÜİFM* 15, 1953-54.

⁷⁷ Most important in this respect are the numerous studies of Prof. H. Inalcik, see also V Mutafovchieva, *Agrarnite otnoshenia v Osmanskata imperia prez XV-XVI v.*, Sofia, 1962, B. Cvetkova, "Prinos kam izuchavaneto na turskiya feodalizm v balgarskite zemi prez XV-XVI v.", *IIBI*, 5-6, 1954, O. L. Barkan, *XV ve XVI Asırlarında Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ziraat Ekonominin Hukuki ve Mali esasları*, İstanbul, 1943.

⁸ See E. Radushev, *Agrarnite institutsii v Osmanskata imperia prez XVII-XVIII vek*, Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo "Prof. Marin Drinov", 1995, Akdağ, M. "Genel Çizgileriyle XVII Yüzyıl Türkiye Tarihi", *TAD*, 1966, 6-7, Y. Özkaya, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğunda Ayanlık*, Ankara: THK Basımevi, 1994.

⁹ See, H. Hadzibegic, *Glavarina u Osmanskoj Drzavi*, Sarajevo, 1966, B. Nedkoff, *Die Gizya (Kopfsteuer) im Osmanischen Reich. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Bulgarien*, Leipzig, 1942,

Unlike *cizye*, in the case of cryptocristianity there are not many primary sources that could be utilized to provide for a comprehensive investigation of this phenomenon, hence, the small number of studies that have addressed the issue does not come as a surprise. Worth mentioning are the articles of S. Skendi, P. Bartl, and S. Dimitrov.¹⁰

S. Dimitrov has also contributed to the study of conversion and apostacy in the context of Islamic legal tradition.¹¹ However, many of his conclusions, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of the present study, are rather exaggerated and far-fetched.

Given the state of modern scholarship, the present study will take up the task to discuss certain aspects of Islamisation on the basis of the above mentioned petitions (*arzuahals*) for conversion to Islam, which roughly cover the period 1670-1750. As this type of sources does possess certain shortcomings (namely, the region and place from which the petitioners come are seldom indicated, as is their respective social status), the study will concern itself primarily with the shedding of more light upon patterns of motivation of the petitioners and the respective factors that conditioned the former, and will also discuss a number of issues related to Islamisation in the light of these documents –was conversion forced or voluntary, what was the attitude of the Ottoman state towards new converts, and what views did Islamic legal tradition hold in the same respect.

E. Grozdanova, "Sabiraneto na danaka cizye v Balgarskite zemi prez XVII i XVIII v., *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1970, No. 5, pp. 75-90.

¹⁰ S. Skendi, "Cryptochristianity among the Balkan Peoples under the Ottomans", *Actes du 1er Congres International des etudes balkaniques et sud-est Europeennes*, vol. 3., Sofia, 1969, P. Bartl, "Kriptokristentum und Formen des religiösen Synkretismus in Albanien", *Beitrage zur Kenntniss Südosteuropas und des Nahen Orients*, vol. 2, München, 1967, S. Dimitrov, "Skritoto hristianstvo i islyamizatsionnite protsesi v Osmanskata darzhava", *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1987, No. 3., pp. 19-33

¹¹ S. Dimitrov, "Fetvi zaizkorenyavane na balgarskata hristianska pravoslavna mirogledna sistema sred pomohamedanchenite balgari", *Vekove*, 1987, No. 2, pp. 27-39.

Chapter 1: Historical Overview (1670-1750)

The period in question falls into a broader one, from the late 16th to the late 18th (i.e. up to the first attempts at outright Westernization during the reign of Selim III), which is generally viewed by modern scholarship as a period of a steady decline and a definitive transformation of Ottoman state and society. Whilst the “decline” paradigm, being value judgement bound, has mislead a good number of scholars into making rather naïve and often emotional simplifications, the concept of transformation, as it alludes, by itself, to the dynamism and fluidity of the historical process, does provide a valuable point of departure for an analysis of the profound changes the Ottoman world underwent in respect to virtually all the significant components of its complex nature – the formation and composition of central and provincial elites, as well as their interaction with the ruling dynasty, military organization, fiscal and landholding regimes, *rea’ya-askeri* and Muslim-*zimmi* relations, as well as the Empire’s changing position within the framework of the international balance of power.

Hence, following the above mentioned notion of historical transformation, this introductory chapter will have the aim to succinctly outline the above mentioned changes (with limiting the analysis to the 1670 –1750 period where possible) for the purpose of providing the reader with the apposite understanding of the historical background in relation to Muslim-*zimmi* relations and Balkan Islamisation, certain aspects of which will be the focus of this study.

In order to get a better idea of the transformation that took place in the Ottoman empire during the 17-18th centuries, a brief sketch of its major features during the so called “classical” period (1300 – 1600) appears to be in place.

The first three centuries in Ottoman history were characterised above all by a considerable degree of socio-economic stability and a relatively well established consensus among the members of the ruling elite in respect to the use and delegation of imperial authority¹², which rested with an able ruler of charismatic leadership qualities. Thus, during this period, the Ottoman empire embodied in itself the major characteristics of the classical Perso-Islamic state model, possessing a highly centralised social structure. The political, social, and economic boundaries among the different social orders (*tabaka*), and more generally between *rea'ya* and *askeri*, were strictly delineated with regard to their respective functions, privileges, and duties, which, by itself, kept social mobility at a fairly low level. The latter contention, however, does not aim at likening Ottoman social structure during the Classical period to a rigid caste system. There existed a certain degree of social mobility, related to the possibility of being enrolled in the military by a special decree of the sultan, the existence of certain groups of *reaya* with special functions (*muaf ve musellem*) and therefore exempt from extraordinary levies, as well as from land taxes, and in exceptional cases even from religious taxes¹³. Worth mentioning is also the gradual incorporation of pre-Ottoman military groups into the *askeri* class and *devşirme* recruitment.¹⁴

The *askeri* class consisted of three main groups – the *kapıkulus* (slaves of the Porte), the *ulema*, and the provincial cavalrymen (*sipahi*). During the classical period *kapıkulus* were mainly recruited through *devşirme* – a levy of boys imposed upon Christian rural population for services at the palace or the divisions of the standing

¹² Abou El-Hadj, Rifa'at 'Ali, *Formation of the Modern State: The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1991, p.15

¹³ Inalcik, Halil, "Osmanlılar'da Rayyet Rusumu", in *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu: Toplum ve Ekonomi*, Istanbul: Eren, 1993, p. 52.

¹⁴ Inalcik, Halil, Donald Quataert, eds., *A social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire: 1300–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 16-17.

army of the Porte. After receiving initial education they were assigned to posts in the palace, or, as it was the case for most of them, filled the ranks of the Janissaries Corps. Some of them left the palace to serve as provincial governors (*sancakbeyis* and *berleybeyis*) and return at a later stage in their lives as viziers in the central government. It is worth noting that although, as already mentioned, there existed a fairly stable consensus among the ruling elites with regard to coercive power, there did appear considerable tensions between *kapikulus* and the *ulema* (the learned professions) in respect to their participation in government at both the central and provincial levels.

The *timar*-holding *sipahi* formed the backbone of the Ottoman army during the classical period, a major part – 30 to 40 percent – of the military expenses was met by way of *timar* assignments, that is through the collection of state taxes by the *sipahis* from *timars* assigned to them in the provinces.¹⁵ Thus, aside from being responsible to participate in military campaigns together with a specific number of *cebellüs*, (fully armed retainers) according to the size of the attained fief, *sipahi* performed essential administrative functions, such as tax collection (from the peasants living on the territory of their fiefs) and the ensuring of order within the territories of the fiefs assigned to them. Although, *timar* fiefs were in practice hereditary during the classical age they were not owned by the *timariots*, but were allotted from the *miri* (state lands) fund. Moreover, *timar* (and also *zeamet*) fiefs were assigned as a taxable unit, it was the fief's tax revenue that a *sipahi* was entitled to collect in exchange for performing specified military and administrative duties, the specifics and duration of *timar* appointments depended solely on the central authority.. Apart

¹⁵ Inalcik, Halil, "Military and Fiscal Transformation I The Ottoman Empire: 1600-1700, *Archivum Ottomanicum*, VI, p.311.

from cultivating a small (core) unit of land assigned to them personally for their own subsistence, they were not interested much in engaging in agricultural production.

The rest of the lands of a *timar* fief were allotted to *rea'ya* peasants through tapu contracts in the form of *çiftlik* or *baştina* units and paid *çift-resmi* or *ispençe* taxes over the land they cultivated. While the state kept its *dominium eminens* (*rakaba*) – proprietary rights -- over its lands, the peasants enjoyed the *usus* and the *usufruct* over the lands they cultivated¹⁶, and thus enjoyed in effect relative freedom under the fairly stable system of check and balances the centralised Ottoman state was able to maintain in order to curb the powers of local officials.

Apart from this, tax farming (*mukataa* leases) was not wide spread in respect to agricultural lands, and moreover, the activities of the *mültezims* (tax-farmers) were subject to strict control. The proportion of privately owned lands (*mülks* and *vakfs*) was kept low. All important practices in respect to landholding and urban economic life were codified in the form of *sancak kanunnameleri*, and conformity to these centrally imposed regulations was insisted without exception.¹⁷ A similar attempt at codification in respect to the activities of state officials was to be seen in the *teşkilat kanunu* enacted by Mehmed II¹⁸.

As far as the Ottoman Balkans are concerned, the classical period was one of mutual adaptation, both for the Ottoman conquerors and the Balkan subject peoples, to the newly emerging conditions. The Ottoman state proved pragmatic enough to gradually incorporate and codify all the social, economic and legal practices of its new Balkan subjects, provided that the former did not contradict the basic tenets of Islamic law and did not affect negatively the interests of the Ottoman state. In a

¹⁶ Inalcik, Halil, "A Social and Economic History ...", pp. 104-105.

¹⁷ El-Hadj, "The Formation ..", p.12.

¹⁸ Inalcik, Halil, "Osmanlı Hukukuna Giriş", in *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu: Toplum ve Ekonomi*, Istanbul: Eren, 1994, p. 328.

seminal article, Prof. Halil Inalcik has outlined the mechanisms of integration of Balkan feudal elites into the centralized Ottoman system. A considerable number of members of pre-Ottoman Balkan feudal elites were assigned *timar* fiefs and were at the same time permitted to preserve their Christian religion, on the only condition that they showed loyalty (*sadakat*) to the Sultan and performed the duties normally assigned to *timar* holders.¹⁹ There were even cases, in which a *timar* fief previously held by a Muslim could be transferred to a Christian *sipahi*.²⁰ In the course of the gradual transformation of the Balkan Ottoman lands from frontier areas into core regions of the empire, these Christian *sipahis* gradually adopted Islam. It should be noted, however, that no signs allude to the implementation of any forms of outright Islamisation policies on behalf of the Ottoman state²¹. While Prof. Inalcik had concerned himself mainly with the Serbian, Macedonian, western Bulgarian and Greek lands, S. Dzaja has outlined similar processes in respect to 15-16 c. Bosnia whereby the conversion of local nobility to Islam progressed at a considerably quicker pace.²²

From the late sixteenth century onwards the established system of checks and balances started to disintegrate and the old equilibrium was already showing signs of breaking down. Briefly put, Ottoman society during the 17-18th centuries was in a state of flux in a sharp contrast to the previous state of equilibrium. The power of the sultan had become significantly weakened, and imperial authority started to be increasingly delegated to royal *vukela* (deputies) and *nudema* (companions) from the court. At the same time, the previously neatly outlined boundaries among the various

¹⁹ Inalcik, Halil, "Stefan Dusan'dan Osmanli Imparatorluguna: XV. Asirda Rumeli'de Hristiyan Sipahiler ve Menşeleri", in *Osmanli Imparatorluğu: Toplum ve Ekonomi*, Istanbul: Eren, 1993, p.93

²⁰ Ibidem, p.92.

²¹ Ibidem, pp.93-94.

²² Dzaja, S. M. *Konfesionalitat und Nationalitat Bosniens und der Herzegovina*, München: R. Oldenbourg, 1984, pp. 30-40.

social orders, and generally, between the *reaya* and *askeri* became progressively blurred. In fact infringement of the *reaya* upon the domain of the *askeri* was normally seen by Ottoman observers of decline, such as Koçi bey, as a major reason for the increasing social, political, and economic “chaos”.²³ All this was accompanied by all-important changes in taxation and increasing decentralisation of Ottoman administration. “The abandonment of *liva kanunnameleri* and the growing pace of tax experimentation should be taken as symptoms of whatever form early modern centralisation had taken in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ... it should therefore also suggest a diminution of the coercive powers of the ruling class in Istanbul”.²⁴ All these consequently to an increasingly uncontrolled abuses and tax extortion that gravely affected the *reaya*, which, in its turn, reacted in the form of social unrest and migrations.

Ottoman scholars have listed numerous reasons for these profound changes that befell the empire, we deem relevant to outline just the most important of them. Indisputably, external factors, like the growing superiority of Western powers, the spread of firearms into the Ottoman countryside, as well as the general halt of Ottoman territorial expansion, the influx of imported silver and aggressive trading policies on the part of Western states were among the most important factors that conditioned transformation of Ottoman state and society. To these, the population pressure factor is generally added as one of vital significance. One should not underestimate the indigenous roots for internal change in Ottoman society for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries²⁵ and the break down of consensus within Ottoman ruling elites together with the corresponding intra-elite struggles.

²³ Inalcik, “Military and Fiscal ...”, pp.283-4.

²⁴ El-Hadj, “The Formation...”, pp. 13-14.

²⁵ Ibidem, p.12.

The emerging military superiority of the West and the subsequent halt of the territorial expansion of the Ottoman state posed quandaries to the central authorities in Istanbul, which led to internal complications induced the Ottoman state to embark upon fundamental changes in respect to its military organization and fiscal regime. As early as during the war of 1593 – 1606 “reports sent by Ottoman commanders from the battlefield to the government indicated that the Ottoman forces, and especially the *sipahi* cavalry armed with the conventional weapons of bow and arrow, lance, sword, and shield, proved ineffectual against the Austrian musketeers”.²⁶ This appeared one reason for the Ottoman government to resort to a steady increase in the numbers of the standing infantry corps: from 13,000 in the 1550s to 38,000 in the 1600s.²⁷ This, in turn, led to the introduction of policies that led to the gradual phasing out of the *sipahi* order. In its scramble for revenues, and being increasingly unable to take care of surplus extraction on its own, the government was forced to transform more and more of the of the *timar* fiefs into *mukataas* (tax farms) which was aimed at supplying the central government with fresh money supply to meet its increasing demands. Significant portions of imperial revenue were farmed out to finance specific Janissary garrisons.²⁸

On the other hand, the central government started relying upon provincial governors to participate in campaigns with their own privately recruited armies from the increasing number of landless peasants (*levents*), the latter being financed through the collection of extraordinary levies (*avariz-i divaniyye*) as well as unlawful extortions (*tekalif-i şakka, salgun, salma*). These soldiers, known as *sekban* and *sarıca*, added to the turmoil in the provinces as they were usually dismissed after the end of each military campaign, and being armed with handguns, whose proliferation

²⁶ Inalcik, “Military and Fiscal ...”, p.288.

²⁷ Ibidem, p.289.

in the provinces the central government was in no position to control, engaged in repeated raids that gravely affected the local *reaya* population. Given the growing settlement of Janissaries in the provincial centers, where they increasingly got involved in economic activities, entering the city guilds and engaging in tax-farming, the *sekban* and *sarıca* soon came to grips with the Janissaries themselves. Many of the former would often require to be appointed to the Janissary corps after the end of a campaign, and in case of a refusal to be awarded such concession could become the reason for serious disturbances, the most well known of which – that led by Yeğen Osman Pasha, who was consecutively appointed to the posts of *Sancak beyi* and *Berlerbeyi* (of Rumelia) by Mehmed IV (1648 – 1687) and Suleyman II, respectively. The latter resorted to such a measure as he saw in Yeğen Osman and his *sekban* army the only group powerful enough to stand up against the Janissaries, who had deposed Mehmed IV²⁹.

These trends were paralleled by increasing decentralisation of the provincial administration. Starting from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the central government began to limit the terms of appointment of local governors with the obvious aim to curb their powers. *Sancak beyis*, in their turn, increasingly delegated their authority to deputies (*mütesellims*), who came from the ranks of the local notables (*ayans*). The *ayan-mütesellims* gradually became more powerful than the local governors themselves. Possessing a solid local power base, *ayans* were also appointed to administer *mukataas* or *malikanes* (lifelong leases, introduced in 1695) which were usually given to palace favourites.³⁰ It is important to note here that by the end of the seventeenth century, it had become a wide spread practice to re-lease

²⁸ Radushev, *Agrarnite institutsii*, pp. 67-68.

²⁹ Inalcik, "Military and Fiscal...", pp.299-300.

³⁰ Inalcik, "Centralization and Decentralization in Ottoman Administration", Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds. *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, Carbondale, 1977, pp. 29-31.

mukataas and *malikanes*, which, given that each consecutive claimant aimed at maximizing his won profit, finally led to increasing extortion of taxes from the *reaya*. Even remaining small *timar* holders found it practical to lease their *timar* fief, thus, unlawfully turning them into small *mukataas*.

In the Balkans, this situation of turmoil and instability was further exacerbated by the fact that the region stood on the way to or was part of the battlefield itself in a number of long and heavy-loss incurring wars with European powers. By that time, the Ottoman Balkans had turned from a frontier zone into a core region of the Empire, with all the initial privileges that were bestowed to Christian elites or *reaya* (e.g. Christian *sipahi* or Christian *muaf* ve *müsellem*) essentially eliminated.

Chapter 2. Sources

Indisputably, in order to understand, and explain more satisfactorily Balkan Islamisation with all its complexity and regional specifics, one is to objectively explore all available archival documents which shed more light one way or another on the nature and major characteristics of this process. The present chapter will make an attempt to present and briefly discuss the various primary sources on which this study is based. The major primary source utilized hereafter is a group of single Ottoman documents (*arzuahals*) from the mid-17th. to the mid-18th c. preserved at the Oriental Department of the National Library St. Cyril and Methodius in Sofia, Bulgaria.

In essence, these documents are expositions of the adoption of Islam on behalf of new converts. In them, together with their formal declaration of having adopted Islam or of being ready to adopt Islam, and a petition for receiving the relevant sums of money for new clothes in accordance with “the custom” or with “the law”, the modern student of history will find much more specific demands related to the solution of some purely personal problem or to the rewarding of certain social privilege (e.g. an appointment to a specific administrative position). Thus, these documents allow for a better exploration of the mechanisms of the Islamisation process and the factors that conditioned it. They depict in greater detail the state of mind of the new converts, their personal motivation, in the context of the changing political and socio-economic situation in the Ottoman Empire during 17th–18th centuries.

The earliest *arzuahals* of this type preserved at the National Library archives in Sofia date from 1088AH / 1677AD, which is by no means a guarantee that the practice of drawing up such documents started that late. Even the earliest examples

preserved in Sofia show a high degree of stereotypy, which itself needed a considerable period of time to be achieved. The *arzuhal*s are normally quite short and contain several important elements: an address to the supreme authority in the empire (the Sultan), a declaration stating that the petitioner is a new Muslim, and a petition for being awarded money for new clothes and/or some other privilege.

The form of these documents, as well as the way they were processed shows that these *arzuhal*s were drawn up in the imperial chancery (*divan*) on behalf of people who came from all parts of the empire (but mainly from the Balkans) to accept Islam in the presence of the Sultan, the Grand Vizier, or other high imperial officials, including the Ağa of the Janissaries or the head of the *bostancı* corps, the *kaymakam pasha*, etc. Of course, this does not mean that all the *arzuhal*s were written just in Istanbul, for, as it is well known, the chancery normally accompanied the sultan (and the grand vizier) in all their campaigns and travels (including hunting expeditions). For some of the *arzuhal*s it is quite clear that they were written in Edirne which Sultans, especially some like Mehmed IV (1648 – 1687), visited quite often.

The practice of drawing up and processing *kisve bahası arzuhal*s however, was not a monopoly of the imperial chancery. Quite understandably, in geographically isolated territories, such as the island of Crete, petitions were processed locally, bore the resolution of the *vali* of Crete, the relevant sums were allotted from the local treasury.³¹

However, recently, we came upon an interesting document – a *hüccet* of the *kadı* of Sofia, dated July, 1709AD, which entitled a certain Osman Çelebi, an inhabitant of Sofia, to take 1 *para* (3 *akçe*) allotted as a daily allowance for “living and the value of clothes” to a certain nine-year old Ayşe, upon her conversion to

³¹ NBKM, 1, 10923, , 1112 AH/1700 AD, f.1-2; NBKM, 1, 10926, 1112AH/1700AD, f. 1-4

Islam.³² This document reveals that it was possible to attain certain social and financial privileges upon conversion at the local level, and thus presents the researcher with a puzzle – according to the information given in a petition from less than a quarter of a century earlier, a man from “the villages of Bosnia” had come to the capital in person to convert in the presence of the Sultan, thus rendering the possible suggestion that Sofia was at too great a distance from Istanbul to allow for such a trip untenable.³³ Also, certain petitions suggest that it was possible for one to go to the capital and submit a petition on behalf of somebody else, thus dismissing, in its turn the argument claiming that a new convert had to necessarily go to Istanbul in person. As the case is the only one of its sort, that we have found, it poses a number of questions, which obviously suggest the need for further research.

Let us return to the petitions, which are the focus of this study. In their functional essence these *arzuhal*s (written in *ta'lik* or *divani* and from 1734 onwards mainly in *rik'a*) represent also the beginning of a financial correspondence, which had to direct and justify the allotment of specific sums of money from the imperial treasury. In them, besides the main text, there are to be found additional entries (*derkenars* – written usually in *nesih* or *siyakat*) which allow us to follow the “route” of each document through the various imperial offices, i.e., the way the *arzuhal*s were processed. As the main part of the *arzuhal*s (i.e. the petition itself) was by rule undated, it is exactly from these additional entries that we get information about the exact date the petitions entered the administrative process, and how quickly they were taken care of (for as these petitions “traveled” from office to office, each of the latter recorded its own date of handling the document).

³² Moreover, the document has been published in P. Petrov, *Po Sledite na Nasilieto*, Sofia, 1987, p. 289, and is originally to be found in a *sicil defteri* preserved in Sofia –NBKM, S. 4, f. 49-1, but strangely enough has escaped the attention of Bulgarian Ottomanists.

³³ NBKM, OAK, 76/52, 1097AH/1686AD

In the case of simple petitions (those just presenting a declaration of adoption the faith and demanding the allotment of the appropriate sum for new clothes) usually only three additional entries are to be observed: a dated resolution of the grand vizier attesting that the petitioner has already become a Muslim and that he/she should be awarded money in accordance with the “custom” or the “law”, normally followed by an undated resolution of the *başdefterdar* (the chief financial officer of the empire) that authorized the issuance of a *tezkire* (*tezkire virile*), and a dated entry of the *başmuhasebe* (the chief accounting office of the empire), attesting that such a document has been issued (*tezkire dade, tezkire virildi*). A quick glance at these additional entries shows that the documents in question were normally processed within 1 to 10 days.

In a great portion of the documents in question, however, the petitioners present their specific situation, sometimes whole life stories, in which they demand the solution of a specific problem: such is the case of a sailor unjustly accused of murder, who pleaded to be forgiven and released from the galley he was sent to work on because “even if I had been guilty, now I have changed” (i.e. accepted Islam)³⁴ – in such cases we find a number of additional entries which attest that thorough investigations have been made to prove the correctness of the information given in the *arzuhal* – recurrent resolutions of the grand vizier, *telhises* (summaries of the case) written to the Sultan, requests on behalf of the *başdefterdar* to the *başmuhasebe* for more information, extracts from the registers of the *başmuhasebe* (or other offices), further notifications, etc.

In many other cases, we find a request (from the grand vizier or the *başdefterdar* to the *başmuhasebe*) for an updated recalculation of the sum that was to

³⁴ NBKM, NPTA XX 1/28, f. 51 (1135AH/1723AD). This case will be discussed in further detail later in this study.

be given for new clothes, which gives us valuable information about changes in the amount of sums normally awarded, as well as about the inflationary processes in the empire over the period the *arzuhal*s refer to. A fine example in this respect provides the petition of a Christian priest who converted to Islam, where one can find additional entries (excerpts from the registers of the bash-muhasebe) showing the respective value of a full set of clothes for 1129AH/1716-1717AD, 1132AH/ 1719-1720AD, and 1133AH/1720-1721AD – 16, 25, and 64 *guruş* respectively.³⁵

Besides, the additional entries on these *arzuhal*s give us more information on the differentiation the Ottoman authorities made in the treatment of different converts in accordance with their social status – thus more money were allotted to converts who had higher social status prior to their conversion, and some who were of special importance to the Porte, such as Count De Bonneval (who participated actively in the reorganization of the Ottoman artillery corps between 1729 and 1747) were given extraordinary treatment.³⁶

Let's return now to the main part of the *arzuhal*s – the contents of the converts' petitions. Essentially, these present us with details about the personal motives of the new converts. As just a few hundred (up to a thousand) *arzuhal*s of this type have been preserved in the Oriental Department of the National Library in Sofia, and other archival collections have not been researched well in this respect up to now, one can hardly use these documents for an analysis of the quantitative parameters of the Islamisation in the Ottoman Empire. The petitions, however, shed more light on the specific factors that influenced the personal drive for becoming a Muslim, such as fiscal pressure and financial difficulties, the quest for social advancement, etc. The contents of the *arzuhal*s also poses some other questions such

³⁵ NBKM, 1A, 6808, f. 1.

as whether the process was forced or voluntary, what was the role syncretic Islam (the role of *tarikats*) and cryptochristianity in predisposing people to convert, whether higher classes were more prone to convert than lower ones or vice versa.

As the above discussed petitions, which have been taken as a point of departure in the present study, provide information that is still fairly limited in scope due to their functional nature, the necessity to consult other primary sources in an attempt to cast more light on such issues appears obvious. Various supplementary sources could be utilised in relation to this.

Among them, *sicil defterleri* (*kadı* court registers) are generally considered by modern scholarship as a source that could provide bountiful information on socio-economic life at the communal level. Ottoman court registers contained not only cases of litigation, but also included financial and property transactions, imperial decrees (*firman*s) regarding the *kadı*'s proper performance of his duties, judicial malpractices, as well as "tax collection (especially the poll tax, or *cizye*, levied on non-Muslim subjects of the Empire), redress of grievances, suppression of banditry, and other matters of administration".³⁷

It is important to note that *zimmi*, men and women alike³⁸, founded it normal to resort to the *kadı* court to seek solutions to legal problems among themselves as well as among themselves and members of the local Muslim community and the representatives of the local authorities. Thus *kadı* court records present the researcher with opportunities to concentrate on various aspects of the daily socio-economic life

³⁶ Count De Bonneval's (Ahmed Bey) case will be discussed in further detail later in this thesis. See pp. 44-45.

³⁷ Jennings, R., "Limitations of the Judicial Powers of the Kadi in 17th C. Ottoman Kayseri", *Studia Islamica*, number XLVIII, 1978, pp. 151-154.

³⁸ Jennings, R., "Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records – the Shari'a Court of Anatolian Kayseri", in *Journal of the economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. XVIII, Part I, p.110., "Zimmis (Non-Muslims) in Early 17th Century Ottoman Records", in *Journal of the economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. XXI, Part III, pp/ 250-251.

of specific groups in the empire, such as *zimmi*s or women, as well as to clarify their social and political position.

Due to certain limitations stemming from the format and focus of this study, *kadı* court registers will be used to procure appropriate evidence in respect to only two important aspects of socio-economic life in the Ottoman Balkans. Firstly, as *sicil defterleri* contain registrations of property transactions, they provide important information in regard to prices of certain goods and estate property (houses, shops, land, etc.), and the latter could be juxtaposed to the financial advantages related to conversion, such as the value of clothes a new convert was rewarded as well as the rate of the *cizye*, from which he/she was made exempt upon conversion to give a relative measure of the extent of financial pressure as a factor that possibly contributed to one's making a decision to convert.

In addition, information derived from *sicils* might give an idea of the degree of intermingling and interaction between members of Muslim and *zimmi* communities in the Balkan city. Estate property as well as financial transactions, as registered in *kadı* court records, normally render the names, professions and/or social status (e.g. Janissary) of the signatories of a contract. Besides, in the case of sale, purchase, and lease of estate property, the boundaries of the estate are normally duly delineated, thus giving a the names of the owners of the surrounding estates. As these names are subjected to a routine antroponymical analysis, the researcher is in a position to acquire a better notion of the social, ethnic, and religious composition of a city or a particular quarter (*mahalle*) as well as the level of social and cultural integration among people belonging to different religious communities and possessing different social status, i.e. to what extent it was normal Muslims to sell and buy property from *zimmi*s, or was it normal for *zimmi*s and Muslims, or new converts (usually designated

as “son of Abdullah”) to live as neighbours. Such questions appear of marked significance in respect to establishing the existence or lack of relative fluidity and flexibility in Muslim-*zimmi* communal life (especially in the cities), which in its turn, could be a factor predisposing or discouraging, respectively, a non-Muslim to convert. The *sicil defterleri* to be utilised in this study are mainly from Sofia, Vidin and Russe, covering the period to which the *arzuahals* for conversion to Islam refer to.³⁹

Fetvas will be utilised to cast more light upon Muslim-*zimmi* relations as well as to examine certain legal of conversion and apostacy. Although *fetvas* are non binding advisory opinions to an individual questioner (*mustafti*), they have a particular appeal to the researcher with their “eternal validity” (they could be applied to any case, given that the circumstances described in the question correspond to those of that real case).⁴⁰ Most Ottoman *fetvas* have been preserved in “secondary *fetva* collections”, i.e. ones, in which “the question and answer have undergone systematic alterations”⁴¹, many highly specific details are omitted, and instead of the names of real persons, “a set of conventional names, usually Zeyd, Amr, Bekr and Bishr for males, and Hind, Zeyneb and Khadija for females” are used.⁴² Another characteristic feature of Ottoman *fetvas*, is that especially after Ebu’s-su’ud, who served as a şeyhü’l-İslam from 1545 to 1574, the procedures for issuing *fetvas* became highly bureaucratised, the question itself was drafted by a trained jurist in the office of the

³⁹ Todorov, Nikolai, and Maria Kalitsin, eds., *Fontes Turcici Historiae Bulgaricae*, Vol. 6 (21), Sofia, 1977, Cvetkova, Bistra, ed., *Fontes Turcici Historiae Iuris Bulgarici*, Vol. 2, Sofia, 1971

⁴⁰ Masud, M., B. Messick, and D. Powers, ‘Muftis Fatwas, and Islamic Legal Interpretation’, in *Muftis and Their Fatwas*, Masud, Messick, Powers, eds., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 3, 19.

⁴¹ Hallaq, W.H., ‘From Fatwas to Furu’: Growth and Change in Islamic Substantive Law’, *Islamic Law and Society* 1, February, 1994, p. 44.

⁴² Imber, C., *Ebu’s-su’ud and Islamic Legal Tradition*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 56.

fetvahane, the final draft being confirmed by the *fetva emini*, and thus a simplified (positive or negative) answer on behalf of the *şeyhü'l-İslam* was presupposed.⁴³

Nonetheless, as, due to their functional nature, it has generally been accepted by modern scholarship that they refer to real life situations, Ottoman do provide important information with regard to Ottoman socio-economic and religious history, as well as to the way specific issues were viewed and dealt with within the context of Islamic legal (Hanefi) tradition.⁴⁴ Two collections of *fetvas* of Ottoman *şeyhül-İslams*, ali Çatalcalı Efendi and Abdurrahim Efendi, will be utilized in the present study. As these works are typical secondary *fetva* collections, one may safely assume, that the *fetvas* contained therein, as they had attracted the attention of the compiler, relate to more or less typical real life problems, which in its turn could provide helpful to clarifying the nature of issues like Muslim-*zimmi* relations, as well as conversion and apostasy.

Apart from Ottoman administrative and legal documents, the use of non-Ottoman sources, such as travel accounts of western and East European observers, appear of special relevance to the study of *zimmi*-Muslim relations and Islamisation in the Ottoman Balkans. As, due to political, economic, and religious reasons, this region has naturally attracted the attention of European political and intellectual circles, life in “European Turkey” became the focus of interest of a steady flow of Europeans who passed through the region most often as members of diplomatic missions. Given the social and political status, the solid educational (and linguistic) background, as well as their prior knowledge of Ottoman affairs, present us with well informed description and assessment of daily life in the Ottoman Balkan provinces, often with a deliberate accent on the life of Balkan (Orthodox) Christians. When

⁴³ Heyd, U., ‘Some Aspects of the Ottoman Fetva’, *BSOAS* 32, pp. 39-41, 49.

⁴⁴ Hallaq, op.cit. pp. 32-37.

utilizing such sources, however, one should be aware of the personal inclinations and biases of these observers, especially in respect to their religious affiliation, their political and professional status, hence the nature of their mission, as well as the current state of relation between the Porte and the respective countries they came from. In addition to this Paul Rycaut's general descriptions of the Ottoman empire and "the Greek Church" also prove to be of use.

Chapter 3. Patterns of Motivation for Conversion. Factors Conditioning Conversion

3.1. Introduction

This chapter is going to deal with the possible factors that affected a *zimmi's* decision in the Ottoman Balkans to convert during the period in question in the light of the information the researcher is able to extract from the herein discussed petitions. These factors could be grouped in three main categories: fiscal pressure, the quest for social advancement, and religious influences, namely, the state of the local Balkan churches, and the role of heterodox religious orders and cryptochristianity in predisposing a non-Muslim to convert.

The evidence that could be derived from the petitions directly points to the existence and influence the first two factors had in conditioning the set of mind of a new convert. One is not to forget that the petitioners had to go to Istanbul in most of the cases (which normally entailed considerable material sacrifices), and that in their functional essence the petitions were meant to finally lead to the convert's being awarded clothes and/or money. In a significant number of *arzuhal's* (as will be shown later) petitioners also asked to be appointed to an administrative position. The fact that converts could ceremonially accept Islam in the presence of high ranking Ottoman officials (and even the Sultan, in certain cases) also alludes to the possibility that at least some of the new converts (given the typical mind frame of lower class people in the empire) may have considered this as an additional chance to be granted specific material or social advantage.

Besides, the above mentioned religious influences should also to be born in mind, as they, although the discussed documents do not provide any cues in this respect, played an important role in predisposing a potential convert to make certain “compromises” related to the changing of one’s faith. One should not underestimate, of course, the existence of cases of genuine spiritual transformation. Given the role of Islamic syncretism embodied by dervish orders, which successfully incorporated many elements of Christianity and Judaism into their heterodox doctrines, such cases may have been (and quite probably have been) numerous, but it is virtually impossible to prove anything on the basis of the text of the *arzuhal*s which are the focus of this paper.

A great portion of the documents that are discussed in this paper contain just a simple declaration of adopting the faith (accompanied with standard expressions like “ I saw light”, “I reached the divine truth”, etc.), together with a demand to receive money for clothes⁴⁵. It is precarious to speculate about the motives of these converts. As many other *arzuhal*s list quite explicitly specific factors for conversion, these converts who presented just a “plain” petition, probably were not pressed by something specific, but just hoped to raise their social status one step up by transforming themselves from Christian or Jewish *reaya* into Muslim *reaya*. As Selim Deringil put it: “the small insults of everyday life, like being called “mürted” rather than “rahmetli” when you die, not being allowed to wear certain colors or

⁴⁵ Numerous examples of this kind may be given: to list just but a few NBKM, 1, 10787, f. 1-2 (1088AH/1677AD); NBKM, 1, 10486, f.1 (1093AH/1682AD); NBKM, NPTA, XX, 1/28, f.42 (1128AH/1716AD); NBKM, 1, 11060, f. 1 (1136AH/1724AD); NBKM, OAK 50/94 f.1 (1263AH/1847AD).

clothes, not being allowed to ride certain animals, the little barbs endured on a daily basis, these must have been the basic reason for many a conversion".⁴⁶

1.2. Fiscal Pressure

Of special interest are the petitions in which heavy material or financial problems were explicitly given as a motive that influenced a new convert to adopt Islam. There abound *arzuhal*s in which petitioners state: "let the merciful Padishah allot me some money for living and small expenses"⁴⁷, "I do not have family and relatives, and come from far away, my legs are crippled"⁴⁸, "we are two infirm boys ... give us a full set of clothes and add something (some money) for food"⁴⁹. A mother of two children stated: "I am a lonely poor woman, do not have relatives or a place to live ... point to me a place to live".⁵⁰

There exist *arzuhal*s in which the new converts present the reasons for their difficult financial situation in great detail. Such is the case of an Armenian woman from Istanbul who explained at length how she rebuilt the house left by her late husband, incurred a debt of 200 *guruş*, rented the house to a *vakf* for 1,5 akçe daily, but later her son sued her over the property rights of the house, and as he was about to win the case, she became Muslim and pleaded to the Sultan to solve her problem.⁵¹ In a similar case a Greek woman abandoned by her husband who also left her with a debt of 30 *guruş* had a dream which said: "Accept Islam, ... then the Sultan will take care of you".⁵²

⁴⁶ Deringil, Selim, "On Conversion and Apostacy in the Late Ottoman Empire", a paper presented at an *Workshop on New Approaches to the Study of Ottoman and Arab Societies (18th to mid-20th centuries)* at Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, May 27-30, 1999.

⁴⁷ NBKM, 1, 11051, f.1 (1134AH/1722AD).

⁴⁸ NBKM, 1A, 57265, f.1 (1132AH/1720AD).

⁴⁹ NBKM, 1, 11056, f.1 (1135AH/1723AD).

⁵⁰ NBKM, 1, 11058, f.1 (1136AH/1723AD).

⁵¹ NBKM, NPTA, XX 1/28, 50 (1134AH/1722AD).

⁵² NBKM, 1, 11106, f.1 (1144AH/1731AD).

There are still other cases in which the heavy financial problems of new converts were immediately taken care of according to the additional entries into their *arzuhal*s. A father with seven children who collectively converted received a daily stipend of 14 akçe from the revenue of Erzurum customs house.⁵³

It is important to note that in most of these cases, the converts were given nothing more than the relevant sum for clothes (at least this is what the resolutions on the documents show). As it will be shown below, however, this sum itself was often quite high to allow for the social pre-categorization of the convert. Besides this, new converts were promptly taken out of the *cizye* registers (as well as from other registers concerning the collection of various taxes paid by non-Muslims).⁵⁴

Here arises another important question – did new converts receive actual clothes or their monetary value. Given the very high amount of money at which “new Muslim clothes” were estimated that the petitioners would undertake a long journey to the capital if they were to be awarded just clothes (moreover, quite a high number of petitions were drawn up during winter time). In a *derkenar* of the *başmuhasebe*, to be found in a petition dated 1122AH/1710AD⁵⁵, it is asserted that in order to preclude misuses at the expense of new converts, they should be given the monetary value instead of actual clothes. In a later petition, dated 1144AH/1731 AD⁵⁶ a new convert asks to be rewarded a full set of clothes or at least half of its value, which clearly

⁵³ NBKM, 1A, 6783, f. 1. (1089AH/1678AD).

⁵⁴ Of special interest here is the conversion from paying *ispençe* to paying *çift-resmi*. A particularly important difference in the rates of the two taxes relates to the specific rates for unmarried men (*mücerreds*). While unmarried Muslims had to pay 12 akçe (classical age rate), compared to 24 for married Muslims, the rate of *ispençe* was unchangeably set at 25 akçe for all adult males. Thus, it is far from surprising that the sizable difference between the rates of *çift-resmi* and *ispençe* for single adult men may well have exerted pressure upon Christian *mücerreds* to convert. Thus, a number of Ottoman fiscal registers pertaining to the Balkan lands show that in many cases, the Muslim single men category is represented predominantly by new converts. A fine example in this respect is the *mufassal defteri* for *kaza* Nevrekob (modern Southwestern Bulgaria) of 1723, in which one may find whole villages in which all unmarried Muslims are “sons of Abdullah” (the information concerning this specific register (BOA, Mevkufat Kalemi, 2873) was kindly provided to me by Dr. E. Radushev).

⁵⁵ NBKM, SI 6, 18, f.3

⁵⁶ NBKM, 1A, 57319, f.9

suggests that he expected to receive a specific sum of money. A number of documents contain an additional notification on their *verso*, attesting that the reward was given to a person who acted as an intermediary (“given to Mehmed Çavuş, Halil Çavuş, etc.), it is logical to think that such people expected a certain sum of money from the beneficiary as a commission, which suggests, in turn, that money, but not clothes was most probably handed out. Two documents of this type date from as early as 1100AH/1689 and 1101AH/1689 respectively.⁵⁷ Such documents also suggest the possibility that some converts may not have traveled to Istanbul, but could have used Ottoman officials, whose functions entailed traveling through the Balkans, as intermediaries to take care of such petitions. Given the lack of evidence that directly points to such a possibility, the latter remains as a mere logical supposition, that still deserves attention.

A. Zheliazkova has also generally proposed that, at least in some cases, and even during the 17th c. the additional entries in the petitions suggested that money was given for buying clothes (the amount of money was thus calculated item by item in a separate entry). Given that the petitions show that even when new converts accepted Islam in the presence of a high Ottoman official, they did not get clothes at that point of time, but had to petition afterwards, probably clothes were not given as such at a specific ceremony, but converts were simply handed out the money to buy clothes themselves. It is another question whether there was any control over what the converts would do with the allotted sum, it is also likely that, in accordance with the Islamic tradition, *kisve bahası* (value of clothes) was simply the symbolic name under which financial grants were awarded upon conversion, as clothes and the change of

⁵⁷ NBKM, 1, 10866; NBKM, 1, 57319

clothes were related in an important way to one's social status and identity in the Ottoman empire.⁵⁸

It is appealing to speculate that such conversions came directly as a result of the increased fiscal burden that non-Muslim faced during the 17th-18th centuries. During this period the rates of *cizye* and *ispençe*, paid exclusively by non-Muslims, as well as *reaya* taxes in general (such as *avariz* and *nüzül*) increased manifold and abuses related to their collection become widespread. We deem it relevant to briefly discuss the nature and rates of these taxes and compare them to the prices of certain goods, especially estate property (according to the information provided in *sicil defterleri*), as well as to the value of clothes a petitioner was granted. This could help to better understand the actual parameters of financial alleviation that the petitioners achieved upon conversion.

The *cizye* was introduced by the Ottomans upon conquest of the different parts of the Balkan peninsula during the late 14th and the first three quarters of the 15th centuries. Sanctioned by *nass* and *ictihad* as asserted in *firman*s (imperial decrees) *cizye* was for the Ottomans a religious poll-tax the collection and spending of which received special care and which was collected as a rule directly for the state treasury by the Sultan's own *kuls*.⁵⁹ *Cizye* was levied upon adult males. Children, women, poor people (especially those living on alms), crippled, blind and old men (normally above 15 years of age), clerics were exempted.⁶⁰ To these one should add certain *reaya* groups with special obligations (*akıncıs*, *voynuks*, etc.) which were normally exempted during the classical age, but later gradually became liable to paying the poll tax.⁶¹ Before 1691, when the central government embarked upon a large-scale tax

⁵⁸ Zheliazkova, op.cit., p. 185, also personal communication with A. Zheliazkova, November, 1999.

⁵⁹ Inalcik, H., "Djizya", EI 2, II, p. 562.

⁶⁰ Hadzibegic, H., *Glavarina u Osmanskoj Drzavi*, Sarajevo, 1966, pp. 13-17.

⁶¹ Ibid. pp. 24.

reform, the poll tax was normally levied per household at rates specific for the different administrative – territorial units of the empire. The rate of *cizye* increased steadily during the 17th c., due to both the debasement of the Ottoman akçe and the increased military expenditure of the empire. In 1604, together with the 30 akçe added as an equivalent of the abolished sheep tax (*resm-i agnam*), 5 akçe *resm-i cülus* and 10 akçe *gulamiye*, the rate of *cizye* was 200 akçe. In 1622 this sum went up to 222 akçe, and in 1633 to 232 akçe.⁶² Between 1651 and 1687, the total rate of *cizye* (which included 40 akçe *mubaşir akçesi*) was between 310 and 385 akçe for different districts in the Ottoman Balkans.⁶³

It should be born in mind, however, that there existed numerous cases of abuse related to the collection of *cizye*. In 1634 there were cases in which tax collectors extorted more than 400 akçe (i.e. up to twice as much as the official rate), and in mid century cases of collection of the *cizye* for the following year were recorded.⁶⁴ It should be admitted, though, that through energetic measures, abuses were curbed to an extent during the time the grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed paşa (1656-1661), and his nephew Fazıl Ahmed paşa (1661-1676).⁶⁵

Amidst a long and heavy loss incurring war with the Holy League, a new system of collecting the *cizye* that replaced household collection with a new method based on individual tax-cards was introduced in 1691, allegedly to conform with the prescriptions of the Hanefi school of Islamic law.⁶⁶ In accordance with the latter taxpayers were divided into three categories – *ala*, *evsat*, and, *adna* (higher, middle,

⁶² Grozdanova, E., "Sabiraneto na danaka cizye v Balgarskite zemi prez XVII I XVIII vek", *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1970, No. 5, p. 83

⁶³ Ibid., p. 84.

⁶⁴ Hadzibegic, op. cit. p. 68

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 86

and lower), usually in proportion 2:6:2, or 1:8:1⁶⁷, but sometimes in another one (e.g. 1:7:2)⁶⁸, and had to pay *cizye* in the amount of 4, 2, and 1 *şerifi dukats*, respectively. Thus, the most numerous category of tax payers was to pay 4.5 *esedi gurus* (540 akçe) in 1691. Given that prior to the reform, a *hane*, which contained on average two *cizye* taxpayers, had to pay up to 450 akçe, and the relative stabilization of prices, the increase of the *cizye* rate in real terms is out of doubt.⁶⁹ This in combination with the increasing decentralization and the growing role of *iltizam* (especially the farming out of tax collection to individuals) further increased the fiscal burden of the (non-Muslim) *re'aya* – malpractices in regard to the collection of the poll-tax (as well as other taxes), such as the taxation of children, infirm and adults, trying to “sell” more tax cards than appropriate, double taxation, etc., which in the past had been considered an exception, became commonplace.⁷⁰ The collectors of *cizye* were particularly prone to misuse and corruption in remote mountainous areas where central state control was weak.⁷¹ “A particularly onerous condition for the Christian peasantry in the Balkans came about from the Ottoman practice of imposing collective responsibility on village communities for poll-tax on fugitives and the dead”.⁷² A. Matkovski has provided us with an example in this respect, showing that the Christian community in a specific village (in Macedonia) had to pay 4200 akçe (*gerihite*) for 5 people who had fled without having paid their *cizye* in 1714.⁷³

It is hard to say what exactly was the extent of the financial burden, the levy of *cizye* brought about. Still, the fact that both prior and after the tax reform of 1691, tax

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁸ Nedkoff, B. *Die Cizya (Kopfsteuer) im Osmanischen Reich. Mit Besondere Berücksichtigung von Bulgarien*, Leipzig, 1942, p.24.

⁶⁹ Grozdanova, op. cit., p. 83.

⁷⁰ Grozdanova, E., “Sabiraneto na danaka jizye v Balgarskite zemi prez XVII i XVIII v.”, *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1970, No. 5, pp. 78, 90.

⁷¹ Nedkoff, B., op.cit. p. 25.

⁷² Inalcik, H., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300—1914*, with D. Quataert, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 69.

payers, especially in the rural areas protested against the increased fiscal burden in the form of revolts and migrations, is a clear indication that, at least in a number of cases, the levies had become unbearable.⁷⁴

The rates for *cizye* for the middle category of *cizye* payers (*avsat*), was 4.5, 5, and 5.5 *esedi guruş* in 1691, 1696, and 1744, respectively,⁷⁵ and if we go back to rates immediately before 1691, we will find their values in the amount of 300 – 400 akçe. At the same time, the value of a full/ ordinary set of clothes in the period 1670 –1691 was around 5000/1000 akçe respectively, and after 1691 it was 50/10 *guruş*. According to a specific document a full set of clothes (*mükemmel kisve bahası*) was valued at 5080 akçe in 1685 (an ordinary set cost approximately five times as little).⁷⁶ A comparison between the respective rates of *cizye* and the values of an ordinary set of clothes would clearly show that, beside being exempted from paying the poll tax, new converts were rewarded a sum of money exceeding the rate of *cizye* two to three times.

In this line of thoughts, it will be of use just to mention the considerable increase of another group of taxes, namely *avariz* and *nüzüül*, during the 1670-1750 period. In the context of endless wars that the empire was engaged in, these two taxes were already annualized and monetarized at rates which were ten to fifteen times as high as the mid-sixteenth century rates – “whereas in the mid-sixteenth century typical *avariz* rates were 30 or 40 akçe per year (as were *nüzüül* rates when monetized),

⁷³ Matkovski, A., *Krepostnistvoto vo Makedonija*, Skopje, 1978, p. 111.

⁷⁴ Nedkoff, op.cit., p. 28.

⁷⁵ Grozdanova, E., op. cit., p. 84.

⁷⁶ NBKM, OAK 52/53, on the basis of the data provided by an Ottoman register for 1679-1680, A. Velkov has pointed to another specific case, in which for that fiscal year, 379 people in the region of Edirne were allotted a total of 583 020 akce, namely 1200 akce each to men and 2170 akce each to women. “Novi danni zapomohamedanchvane v yugoiztochna Trakia”, *Vekove*, 1986, No. 3, pp. 73-75.

by the time they had reached formal stability in the mid-seventeenth century the formal *avariz* level was 325 akçe per tax house, the *nüziil* 600.⁷⁷

A. Zheliazkova has pointed out that, according to information taken from *sicil* registers from Sofia and Bitolya from late 17th century the average value of a town house was around 4000 akçe, the average value of a village house was only 1720 akçe.⁷⁸ Excerpts from Sofia *sicil defterleri* show that an average size house in Sofia used to sell for 34 – 40 *guruş* in 1709.⁷⁹ In a systematic study of the Ottoman Balkan city, N. Todorov has provided data, based upon kadi court registers from Vidin, Sofia, and Russe, in respect to the prices of houses in the 17th and 18th centuries. During the second half of the 17th c. 65% of the houses in Sofia, 28.5% in Vidin and 55% in Russe had prices lower than 5000 akçe.⁸⁰ For the same three towns, 91 to 52 percent of the houses (this percentage was diminishing gradually from decade to decade) had prices below 100 *guruş*.⁸¹ Thus, it may easily be seen that even the value of ordinary set of clothes amounted to a significant proportion of the price of an average town house, and up to half of that of a village one.

It is hardly possible to prove that people converted only for financial reasons on the basis of such documentary evidence, poor people have always existed in the village as well as in the city, and the number of *arzuhal*s we have at our disposal is too limited to allow us make such blanket generalizations, we can just confine ourselves to the contention that the fiscal pressure factor appears possible and logical in the context of the documents discussed, being an important element of a whole set

⁷⁷ Mc Gowan, B., *Economic Life in Ottoman Europe: Taxation, Trade and the Struggle for Land, 1600–1800*, Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1981, pp. 109-110. The size of an *avariz* tax house could be anything between 3 and 15 households, but normally was around 3-4, Ibid., p. 106.

⁷⁸ Zheliazkova, A. *Razprostranenie na Islyama v Zapadno Balkanskite zemi pod Osmanska vlast (15-18ti v.)*, (The Spread of Islam in the Western Balkan Lands under Ottoman Rule, 15-18th c), Sofia: BAN, 1990, p. 185.

⁷⁹ *Fontes Turcici Historicae Bulgaricae*, vol. VI, pp. 282,284.

⁸⁰ Todorov, N. *Balkanskiyat grad: XV-XIX vek: sotsialno-ikonomichesko i demografsko razvitie*, Sofia: Nauka i Izkustvo, 1972, pp 154-155.

of factors which conditioned Balkan Islamisation. What is more important to note here is that during the period these *arzuahals* were drawn up, conversion to Islam seemed to have been widely accepted as a fairly easy, prompt, effective, and legitimate way of relieving one's financial burden.

3.3. The Quest for Social Advancement

Undoubtedly, the alleviation of financial burden resulting from adopting Islam was a serious motive. Of no lesser significance, however, was social motivation. The adoption of Islam raised the social status of the convert one step up, he moved from the ranks of the Christian *reaya* to those of Muslim *reaya*. The Muslim had certain privileges in his dealings with the administration, he spared himself a number of troubles "reserved" for the Christian *reaya* subjects. Also, in accordance with the basic tenets of Islamic law, were not permitted to act as witnesses against Muslims in *kadı* courts.

Besides, the very existence as a Muslim made it possible to enter the ranks of the *askeri* class, which meant exemption from *reaya* taxes. This was not an imaginary, but quite real a possibility, in fact. An excellent example for this is to be found in the *mufassal* register for *kaza* Nevrokop of 1723, where, in the village of Musomishte, out of 78 Muslim households, there were 30 *yeniceri* households, in the village of Koprivlen 20 out of 52, in Lyalyovo – 12 of 15, etc; the antroponymical analysis shows that these were neither *devşirme* recruits nor soldiers from the capital, thus reminding of the famous "Bosnian exemption" – the permission given by Mehmet II for recruiting "sünnetli" Janissaries, sons of recent converts.⁸²

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 161.

⁸² Radushev, "Demografski...", p. 80.

In this context, the practically countless petitions (especially from the first half of the 18th. century), in which new converts asked to be included in a certain military corps – a specific Janissary regiment or *sipahi*, do not come as a surprise. Some of the *arzuhal*s strike with the extremely well specified demands of the new converts. One asked to be appointed *cebeci* in the 27th *cemaat* of the Janissary corps⁸³, another wanted to join the 33rd *ocak* of the same corps.⁸⁴ Yet another came with all of his family from the village of Razboyna (*kaza* Eski Cumaya – Modern Targovishte in Northern Bulgaria) to collectively convert to Islam and ask so that “you appoint me to your illustrious *sipahi* regiments”.⁸⁵ Some *arzuhal*s clearly attest that the petitioners have been appointed to such positions, but fail to provide us with any information in regard to why the specific people were appointed.⁸⁶ In other cases petitions were drawn up after conversion to Islam and an appointment to the Janissary regiments and concern themselves just with the allotment of *kisve bahası*, such is the case of a man from Eflak who wrote a petition after he accepted Islam in the Sultan’s presence, was appointed to the *bostancı* corps, but did not get clothes,⁸⁷ or a Greek appointed to the hospital of the same corps who also was not given clothes initially.⁸⁸ Most of the *arzuhal*s discussed here do not show clearly that the petitioners received the positions they demanded. As A. Zheliazkova points out, however, “it is likely that the petitioners received the office they wanted or another one, as the Porte needed such conscripts, and the practice to address such petitions to the central authorities did

⁸³ NBKM, OAK 78/39.

⁸⁴ NBKM, OAK, 34/2.

⁸⁵ NBKM, 1A, 57254, f.1 (1133AH/1720AD).

⁸⁶ NBKM, 1, 10981, 1118AH/1706AD, f.5; NBKM, 1, 10988, 1121AH/1709AD.

⁸⁷ NBKM, 1, 11000, f.4 (1124AH/1712AD).

⁸⁸ NBKM, 1A, 57279, f.1 (1134 AH/1721AD).

not cease for more than 150 years”.⁸⁹ This suggestion sounds quite logical, one should not forget, however, that even if a small number of people had been appointed to administrative positions, this could have been enough to create the myth that one could succeed and to prompt people to petition accordingly.

Numerous are other petitions that just expressed a desire for the appointment to a “relevant” position. Sometimes conversion to Islam was deemed to increase one’s chances at receiving a *mültezim* position – such is the case of a Jew who worked at the Imperial minting house and upon conversion to Islam asked to be given a *berat* to manage the mint in exchange of 30,000 akçe per year.⁹⁰

Before discussing such transformations of social status in more detail, it would be relevant to say a few words about the respective roles Muslim and *zimmi*s played in the socio-economic life in the Ottoman Balkans, and especially in the cities. First, it is to be noted that Islam started spreading first in the cities as, on the one hand, it was the cities that for natural reasons were the initial object of Ottoman colonization and the introduction of Ottoman/Islamic administrative, and religious institutions. On the other hand, the cities possessed concentrations of Christians and Jews who were in control of considerable financial capitals and were interested in preserving their leading social positions.⁹¹

The spread of Islam among local Balkan city elites on a large scale developed first in Bosnia, due to the specific character of the province. Being a border region, it occupied a strategic position related to the empire’s military campaigns against Western European powers. For this reason, many settlements in the region enjoyed the special attention of the central Ottoman government, and together with being practically developed as strategic urban centers with the introduction and

⁸⁹ Zheliazkova, op.cit., p. 186.

⁹⁰ NBKM, NPTA XX, 1/28, f. 26 (1119AH/1707AD).

development of Ottoman institutions, they were promptly raised to the status of *kasaba* as early as in the second half of the 15th century – among these were Yeni Pazar, Ustikolina, Sarajevo, and Zvornik.⁹² Besides, S. Dzaja has pointed to the *Verweltlichung* (secularization) of the Bosnian nobility by that time, largely due to the existence of weak church organization in Bosnia in combination with the high degree of economic prosperity Bosnian cities had achieved since the beginning of the 15th century.⁹³ This, as it practically meant loose bonds with their previous religion also contributed to an easier transition to Islam.

The specific circumstances in Bosnia put aside, it is widely accepted that the early Ottoman colonists in the Balkans lacked the sufficient financial capital to engage actively in large scale economic activities. Initially, due also to the specifics of the process of mutual adaptation of both the Ottomans and the local population to the new political situation, local economic elites were able to maintain leading positions, especially in respect to the farming out (*iltizam*) of state revenues in the Balkan cities. As the Ottoman Balkans were gradually transforming from a border zone into a core region of a classical Islamic empire, the participation of Muslims in such activities started to be favored by the central authorities by the second half of the 16th century.⁹⁴ From the very beginning of the period of Ottoman domination, it had become a practice for many wealthy Jews and Christians to seek partnership with Muslims, with the evident objective to stand better chances for being given a *mukataa* lease from the central government.⁹⁵ Thus, the growing Islamic character of the Ottoman Balkans prompted two important developments with regard to economic life

⁹¹ Zheliazkova, op.cit., p. 179.

⁹² Dzaja, op. cit. p. 38.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 28.

⁹⁴ Zheliazkova, op, cit., p, 179.

⁹⁵ Radushev, E., *Agrarnite institutsii v Osmanskata imperia prez XVII-XVIII vek*, Sofia: Akademichno Izdatelstvo "Prof. M. Drinov", 1995, p. 45.

in the Balkan Ottoman cities: first, obviously a good number of *zimmi* capital holders were stimulated to convert in order to preserve their economic leverage, and second, many free-born Muslims, acting initially as intermediaries (partners) between non-Muslim capital holders and the central government, had started acquiring substantial financial capital, which gradually enabled them to engage themselves alone in large scale economic activities. What is most important in respect to our discussion, is that by the end of the 16th century the *zimmi* element had been pushed out by the newly forming Muslim political and economic elites.⁹⁶ Similar pressures were active in respect to artisans and merchants. In addition to being at disadvantage as payers of *cizye*, *zimmi* artisans often suffered from disloyal competition on behalf of Muslim craftsmen who benefited from their membership in guilds that were Islamic in character (headed by a *şeyh*, they also entailed certain missionary and proselytizing activities) and managed at times to take advantage in getting state orders.⁹⁷ This predominance of the Muslim element in the socio-economic life in the Balkan city, would last until the second half of the 17th century, when *zimmi* merchants (Greeks, Armenians, and Jews) gradually started to play a definitive role within the context of the integration of the empire (and more specifically, its European provinces) into the world economy. Thus, being a Muslim was obviously an essential advantage in the socio-economic life of the Balkan cities in the period the above discussed petitions refer to.

As it was shown above, the desire to be appointed to various regiments of the Janissary corps was manifest in a great number of petitions. In order to provide a viable explanation of this phenomenon, it should be noted that by the mid-17th century several important changes had occurred in the corps's functional nature as well as in

⁹⁶ Mutaľchieva, V., "Otkupuvaneto na darzhavnite prihodi v OsManskata imperia prez XV-XVII v. I razvitieto na parichnite otnoshenia", *Istoricheski Pregled*, No. 1, p. 56.

respect to its composition. First, as early as by the beginning of the 17th century the Janissary corps had lost its viability as a foremost military unit which played decisive role in imperial military campaigns. Instead, it already resembled a Pretorian guard which dominated politics in the capital. The members of the six regiments of the Porte (the *kapıkulus*) had been instrumental in influencing imperial policies, and played a key role with regard to the deposition of a number of Sultans, like Osman II (1618-1622), and later Ibrahim (1640-1648) and Mehmed IV (1648-1687). Besides, the traditional method of recruitment through *devşirme* had largely withered, it had started to be infiltrated by people that had little to do with the military profession – entrepreneurs, merchants, tax farmers, artisans.⁹⁸ All this is to be understood in the context of the increasing settlement of Janissaries in the provincial urban centers (initially in the function of guardians of the Sultan's authority) and the privileges and opportunities that the Janissary status offered in the economic life of the empire. The salary which the Janissaries received regularly, together with their being exempted from taxes, provided them with the opportunity to engage in usury and further increase their wealth.⁹⁹ Certain Janissaries, *kethuda-yeri* (local commanders of the *kapıkulu sipahi*), or the *serdars*, for example could act in the capacity of *emins* (government agents) and *mültezims* (tax-farmers), and be instrumental in the collection of taxes.¹⁰⁰ Janissaries were given special privileges at certain *mukataa* auctions where the collection of certain taxes like *resm-i agnam* (sheep tax), *cizye*, *avariz* and *nüzul* were farmed out by the central government.¹⁰¹ Often, given that they possessed sufficient knowledge of local economic conditions, they acted as tax farmers in alliance (*ber vech-i iştirak*) with high ranking officials who provided in

⁹⁷ Zheliazkova, op.cit., p. 180.

⁹⁸ Radushev, *Agrarnite institutsii*, p. 52.

⁹⁹ Akdağ, M. 'Genel çizgileriyle XVII. Yüzyıl Türkiye Tarihi', TAD, vol. 4, No. 6-7, p. 203.

¹⁰⁰ Inalcik, "Military and Fiscal transformation", p. 291.

their turn, viable political support. Also, Janissaries were often given the right to administer as *emins ocaklık mukataas* (tax-farms, whose income was allocated directly to the maintenance of a provincial Janissary unit).¹⁰²

By the mid-17th century, Janissaries had also started to play a considerable role in agriculture, first as *mültezims* of agrarian *mukataas*, and later as *çiftlik* (large farm) owners, as they were in a position to seize *miri* lands and appropriate certain fiscal prerogatives of the central authorities, as well as to extort (through usury) land from indebted peasants, and attracted the latter to their farms as paid workers, providing them the apposite protection.¹⁰³ Janissaries started entering the ranks of the city guilds performing protective functions and buying *gedik* (the right to ownership of an artisan's shop (*dükkan*)).¹⁰⁴

Thus, “in the seventeenth century, emerging as a dominant group in the Ottoman cities and towns, the *kapıkulus* soon extended their control over agricultural lands as well as over provincial trade... not only did they enjoy a leading position in urban socio-economic life, they also became a determining factor in urban politics, and, with the weakening of the authority of the central government, their role as representatives of local autonomy in the provinces became increasingly prominent”.¹⁰⁵

In the context of the above outlined changes in the nature of the Janissary corps, as the *devşirme* system was practically dead and the (male) Muslim-Turkish element in the Balkans was declining demographically due to heavy war losses,¹⁰⁶ it is not difficult to understand this mass drive to enter the Janissary corps on behalf of

¹⁰¹ Radushev, *Agrarnite institutsii*, p. 52.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁰³ Georgieva, Tsvetana, *Enicherstvoto v bukgarskite zemi*, Sofia, 1989, pp. 116-130.

¹⁰⁴ Todorov, op.cit., p. 117.

¹⁰⁵ Inalcik, “Military and Fiscal transformation”, p. 291.

new converts. One can imagine the psychological effect upon the non-Muslim payer of the poll-tax when the collector appeared to be a recent convert, and often his fellow countryman – the newly converted Janissary served as an example how nice it is to be a Muslim in this world, holding a state administrative position on top of this¹⁰⁷.

In some cases conversion to Islam was used as a way to drastically change one's social position – such are the stories of the above mentioned sailor who was released from slave work on the imperial galleys (to where he was sent after being accused of murder) and a prisoner of war captured by the Ottomans in the Battle of Belgrade (1717) and shared the same fate until he converted.¹⁰⁸

Of special interest are some *arzuahals* written on behalf of Westerners, especially those who converted in their desire to join the Ottoman army as officers or experts. A typical example in this respect is the petition on behalf of Venetian, who was subsequently given a full set of clothes. In an additional entry in his petition for conversion to Islam one can read a special resolution of the Grand Vizier to the head of the bombardier corps Ahmed Bey to find a “relevant job” for the new convert.¹⁰⁹ The same Ahmed Bey --previously Claude Alexander, Count De Bonneval who served both with Louis XIV and with Eugene of Savoy, came to the Ottoman Empire, converted to Islam, and concentrated his energy on the organization of the bombardier corps which he managed according to Austrian and French methods until his death in 1747.¹¹⁰ In a *firman* that is preserved in Sofia archives, a daily stipend of 1300 akçe was allotted to Count De Bonneval.¹¹¹ This hardly suggests that the former Austrian

¹⁰⁶ Sugar, P., *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804*, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1977, p. 222.

¹⁰⁷ Radushev, op.cit. p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ NBKM, OAK, 43/45, f.1 (1131AH/1719AD).

¹⁰⁹ NBKM, 1, 11111, f.1 (1145AH/1732AD).

¹¹⁰ Jelavich, B., *History of the Balkans: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 116.

¹¹¹ NBKM, OAK 13/46, published by B Nedkov in Arabic script in his *Osmanoturska diplomatika I paleografia*, Vol. 2, Sofia, 1972, pp. 73-74.

general converted to Islam from purely spiritual motives, moreover it implies that the actual sincerity of the conversion did not unduly occupy the Ottomans, particularly when it was a matter of skilled elements joining the ranks.

3.4 Religious influences

After all these examples have been presented it is relevant to turn to some more general issues related to conversion as represented in the documents discussed above. Above all the presented petitions do not provide cogent evidence of forcible Islamisation (which does not of course mean that examples of it did not exist at all). Every religion willingly encouraged proselytism, it was so in the Ottoman state too. Conversion, however, was rarely a result of coordinated state policy and remained a matter of religious zeal at the communal level. There existed other factors that made conversion more acceptable in the eyes of new converts. Among these the most important were the state of local Orthodox and Catholic Churches, folk Christianity, as well as the role of religious syncretism and crypto Christianity.

In this context, the state of the Balkan (Orthodox) churches under Ottoman rule appears to be of paramount importance. We would agree to S. Dzaja that it was not only Christian heterodoxy (folk Christianity and heresies), but also, and probably to a greater extent, weak church organization per se, that facilitated the spread of Islam in the Ottoman Balkans.¹¹² Although Dzaja propounded his argument in respect to 15-16th c. Bosnia in particular, it would not be that problematic to sustain such an argument in view of the Ottoman Balkans in general and extend it over a significantly broader time span. Balkan historians usually agree that the local parish was the micro-world of Balkan Christians under Ottoman rule. Expulsion from it (upon conversion to Islam) practically meant the often painful severance of decades –

¹¹² Dzaja, S.M., *Konfessionalitat und Nationalitat Bosniens und der Herzegowina*, Munich: R. Oldenborg, 1984, p. 40.

long, viable social links and required that new convert to search for a new religious identity and socio-religious status within the local Muslim community, which, for its part not always accepted convertites without reserves.

This said, one is to address the questions of the cohesiveness of local Christian communities, the density of the parish and monastery networks in various parts of the Balkans, the availability of priests and the level of their respective professional education – these are all factors, which related to the capability of the Orthodox church to prevent individual as well as mass conversion to Islam. The information we have got from Western travelers at various points of time appears quite useful in respect to any attempts at casting more light on this problematics. The Austrian traveler Simpert Niegel, who passed through the Bulgarian lands in 1699- 1700, informs us of a case in which a still unbaptised four-year old child of Orthodox parents in a village near Yanbolu received baptism from a Catholic priest due to the lack of Orthodox priests in the region.¹¹³ S. Gerlach (second half of 16th c.) asserted that an Orthodox priest served on average between 6 and 10 villages in Ottoman Bulgaria,¹¹⁴ and the Russian traveler V. Barskii (early 18th. C.) set this number at 5-6.¹¹⁵ In towns, parishes were not always territorially compact either, the number of Christian quarters (*mahalles*) often being much higher than that of churches.

In her comprehensive study of the Bulgarian church under Ottoman rule O. Todorova has utilized Ottoman detailed tax registers in her attempt to present a systematic picture of the ecclesiastical network in various parts of the Balkans, with special respect to the number of Orthodox priests in juxtaposition to that of households and villages they served.

¹¹³ *Nemski I avstriiski patepisi za Balkanite XVII – sredatea na XVIII vek*, M. Ionov, ed., Sofia, 1986, p. 201

¹¹⁴ Gerlach, S., *Dnevnik na edno patuvane do Osmanskata porta v Tsarigrad*, B. Tsvetkova and M. Kiselinceva, eds., Sofia, 1976, p.256.

Thus, only 45% of the villages in the *vilaet* of Veles had their own priests in 1445, this percentage was 37 for the region of Sofia in the 3rd quarter of the 15th c., 32 for the *sancak* of Vidin during the second half of the 16th c., 9 for the *kaza* of Petrich in 1665, and 37 for the *kaza* of Tirnovo in the late 17th-early 18th. cc., respectively. Although Todorova acknowledged certain shortcomings in regard to the reliability of the specific Ottoman sources she had utilized, she did not fail to point to the very low percentages for Northeastern Bulgaria and establish a positive relationship between the latter and the wave of large-scale Islamisation in this region over the whole period of Ottoman rule.¹¹⁶

All this said, it is worthy to note that, beside their numerical scarcity in a number of cases, Orthodox priests were quite often poorly educated in respect to even certain basic tenets of the Christian doctrine, which had its related effect upon the religious consciousness of their parishioners. The Jesuit scholar R. Boshkovitch, who passed through the Balkans in 1762 informs us of a parish priest in a big village in the vicinity of Varna, who was so ignorant that he asked him whether there were priests in Rome and scolded him for not wearing a beard.¹¹⁷ Two centuries earlier, Gerlach drew a similar picture – the villagers in the village of Semische (near Khaskovo. Hasköy) “did not know what the village priest was doing during liturgy... he had not taught them neither the Lord’s Prayer, nor the Ten Commandments, nor anything else, so that among 1000 Christians, no one knew them... they just knew they were Christians.”¹¹⁸

In addition to the poor education of priests, and the scanty knowledge of the Orthodox doctrine on the part of most Christians, especially in the rural areas, it is

¹¹⁵ cited in O. Todorova, *Pravoslavната tsarkva i Balgarite XV–XVIII vek*, Sofia, 1997, p. 78.

¹¹⁶ Todorova, O, op.cit. pp. 83-86.

¹¹⁷ Boshkovitch. R., “Dnevnik na edno patuvane”, M. Todorova, ed., Sofia, 1975, p.55

¹¹⁸ Gerlach, op.cit., p. 257.

relevant to mention folk-Christianity and popular heresies as a factor for conversion. Although Bulgaria, Serbia, and Byzantium appeared to be predominantly Orthodox at the time of the Ottoman conquest, this assumption was only true “in terms of the formal institutional life of the Balkan Orthodox churches, it is invalid for the folk culture of the inhabitants of these three medieval states”, as “the religious life of the Orthodox masses resided on a foundation which was heavily influenced by their pagan roots”.¹¹⁹ Through the countless political and religious changes in the long history of the Balkans, the peasant’s way of life changed remarkably little and various customs and cults of pagan origin like those toward fertility, the tree, or the house snake as the protective spirit of the hearth continued to have their place in village life – “consequently the popular religion of the Balkan peoples, even in modern times, displays many pronounced archaic features which predate the appearance of both Islam and Christianity in the Balkans”.¹²⁰

It is also worth mentioning that at least in some regions, religious strife also played a significant role in weakening the Christians’ religious affiliation. The most characteristic example is that of Albania, where the religious split between the Northern, predominantly Catholic, and the Southern, Orthodox, part of the country left indelible marks in the religious worldview of the Albanians, the continuous strife between the Papacy and the Patriarchate of Constantinople helped in blurring their religious views and in alienating them from the church.¹²¹

Again, we are far from absolutizing the significance of all this in respect to Islamisation, but, anyway, deem it an important element of a broader set of factors which conditioned the spread of Islam in the Ottoman Balkans.

¹¹⁹ Vryonis, S., “Religious Changes and Patterns in the Balkans, 14th –16th Centuries”, in *Aspects of the Balkans: continuity and change*, H. Birnbaum and S. Vryonis, eds., The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1972, p. 154.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp.154-156.

Orthodox Christians also resorted often to Islamic *kadı* courts in relation to various cases which were formally in the competence of local parish courts as well. The Ottoman state had acknowledged the right of the Christian Church to administer justice, more specifically in cases related to family law. Non-Muslims, however, were not prohibited to go to *kadı* courts to bring suits against each other, or to settle disputes, and register changes in family status. Court fees at *kadı* courts were often lower than those at parish courts; thus, this could be considered a factor that encouraged non-Muslims to seek the services of purely Islamic institutions, which, in turn contributed to their estrangement from the local parish community and presented Islamic institutions as a (preferred) alternative to Christian ones. Thus, in the Land Code of 1609 the marriage fee at the *kadı* court was set at 25 akçe, the corresponding fees in the archbishopric of Ohrida for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd marriage, were 80, 160, and 240 akçe in 1633, 40, 80, and 120 akçe in 1638, and 100, 200, and 300 akçe in 1669, respectively.¹²² If we follow standard estimates of the rate of the value of the silver akçe at different points of time in Ottoman history, we shall see that parish court fees were significantly higher (often twice as much) than those at *kadı* courts.¹²³

Apart from this, the *Şeriat* was more lenient in its treatment of marriage and divorce – it was not that strict in respect to marriage between relatives, allowed marriage between people of different faith (especially between a Muslim husband and a non-Muslim wife), and was far more loose on divorce.

As far as the nature and the role of Muslim dervish missionaries and their orders is concerned, it should be pointed out that no indications of their influence could be derived from the above discussed petitions. Given that the *arzuhal*s were

¹²¹ Zheliazkova, op.cit. 193.

¹²² Todorova, O., op. cit., pp. 164-5.

¹²³ See Pamuk, S. "Money in the Ottoman Empire, 1326 – 1914", İnalcik and Quataert, eds., *An Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire*, vol II, pp. 963-4.

submitted with the very aim to be awarded a financial grant, and the texts of the petitions, relates to financial and socio-economic motives, we are not in a position to satisfactorily determine the extent to which, Islamic syncretism was influential in respect to the petitioners' decision to accept Islam. True, one could object that the above discussed weakened state of the local Balkan churches is not supported by evidence to be found in the petitions. However, there exists a marked difference in the nature of these two factors and in the way they influenced the mindset of a potential convert. While the church factor (together with folk Christianity) played a general role in preparing the soil for conversion to another religion, be it a genuine spiritual transformation or only a socio-political and economic expediency, and thus influenced the process of Islamisation only indirectly, it deserves our attention without necessarily being manifest in the above discussed documents. The role of the Heterodox Islamic missionaries, on the other hand, was related to influencing a non-Muslim to make a specific religious choice, the dervish orders were active in specific regions and affected specific people, at a specific time. The format of this study does not allow for detailed analysis of dervish missionary activities in the Balkans, and even if that was possible, any attempt to directly relate Islamic syncretism to the petitions discussed here would be far-fetched. For these reasons, we will confine ourselves to briefly outlining some of the heterodox orders' most important characteristics in order to give an idea what role they could possibly have played.

Their mystical ritual was more attractive, it fed people's hopes for contact with the other world, it healed them, and promised salvation from worldly life. Islamic orthodoxy was related to a lot of prohibitions and mystical orders were prone to absorb specific elements from other confessions, as for them the road to God was one for all. As P. Sugar put it: "the dervishes wandered almost constantly preaching

and practicing their *tarikats* and numerous related ceremonies. They were the babas, a sort of combination of holy man, miracle worker, medicine man, etc., and were often regarded as living saints. Their eclecticism and pragmatism knew practically no bounds. Given the numerous similarities between folk-Christianity and folk-Islam, they had no difficulty in fitting local customs into their *tarikats*... It was not difficult for Christians whose faith was of the superstitious folk variety to pass over to a similar but more secure folk versions of Islam.”¹²⁴

Heterodox orders such as those of Bektaşî and Mevlevî were in fact heretical in contents, but Orthodox by declaration, as seen by the central authorities. Despite their syncretic practices, the central government saw in dervish orders an instrument for further expansion and consolidation, the close link between some orders and certain Ottoman institutions, e.g. between the Bektaşî order and the Janissaries was tacitly recognized by the government.

Cryptochristianity presented people who sought to escape their socio-economic plight with a much more direct alternative. As many people, especially in the countryside, were forced to adopt Islam under the increasing pressure of fiscal burden, the local church (both Orthodox and Catholic) was often prone to continue recognizing them as its members. Thus, these “double believers” tried to preserve their true religion behind the facade of Islam, which gave them a number of socio-economic advantages. The fact that to-be converts knew of the possibility to practice cryptochristianity, was certainly a factor that additionally predisposed many of them in making their decision to convert. As an essentially post-conversion practice, however, cryptochristianity will be discussed in the next chapter, with special

¹²⁴ Sugar, op.cit., pp. 53-54.

attention being paid to the way it was viewed by the Ottoman government as well as the Islamic legal tradition.

Chapter 4.:Post-conversion Practices. The Attitude of the Ottoman State and Islamic Legal Tradition toward Converts

In this last chapter, we will discuss post-conversion issues and practices characteristic for a new convert, the Ottoman state and the local community, as well as the question of use of force in converting people, and the general attitude of both the Ottoman state and Islamic law towards conversion and new converts.

As an essentially post-conversion practice cryptochristianity was not discussed in the previous chapter. Still, it should be said that, as potential converts were most probably aware of the existing possibilities to practice it, it also may well be considered as a factor that facilitated conversion, as it presented people who sought to escape their socio-economic plight with a direct alternative. As many people, especially in the countryside, were induced to adopt Islam under the increasing pressure of fiscal burden, the local church (both Orthodox and Catholic) was often prone to continue recognizing them as its members. Thus, these “double believers” tried to preserve their true religion behind the facade of Islam, which gave them a number of socio-economic advantages. It was of crucial importance that Islamic law ruled out the possibility for a convert to return back to his previous religion. Thus, even if conversion was just meant to be overt, an irreversible process of assimilation started. It was further strengthened by certain *fetvas* issued by Ottoman *Şeyhülislams* such as that of Abdurrahim Efendi, which ruled that Muslims should not talk in infidel tongues unless this was really unavoidable.¹²⁵ Thus, even if a new convert was practically continuing to practice his previous religion, his/her children and grandchildren were born as Muslims, their link to their grandfathers’ religion

¹²⁵ Danişmend, I.H., *Tarihi Hakikatler*, Cilt II, Istanbul, 1979, p.661.

progressively weakened. Thus, there existed a whole range of transitional stages, of religious syncretism, which combined in different degrees old beliefs and practices with Islam.¹²⁶ This was probably also sensed by Ottomans who ostensibly did not bother that much with the sincerity of new converts but probably realized the inevitability of gradual conversion from generation to generation.

The very existence of a considerable number of *fetvas* addressing apostacy and pre-conversion (i.e. non Muslim) practices on behalf of neophytes in the authoritative *fetva* collections of such prominent Ottoman *Şeyhülislams* like Ali Çatalcalı Efendi and Abdurrahim Efendi, whose terms of office were in the late 17th. and the early 18th centuries respectively, is a clear indication that the issues of apostacy and cryptochristianity (at least partly) were extant. It is characteristic of *fetva* collections that “the overriding concern of the authors of this works was the incorporation of law cases that were relevant and needed at the time and age in which they were writing... this is evidenced ... in the untiring insistence of virtually all authors on the necessity to include in their works cases that are deemed to be relevant to contemporary needs and that are of wide occurrence (*ma ta’ummu bihi al-balwa*), and to exclude those that have ceased to be of relevance of the community and its needs”.¹²⁷

In the *fetva* collections of both *Şeyhülislams*, one may find standard *fetvas* regarding apostacy, as well as such addressing a case of a neophyte behaving as a and infidel and refusing to stop doing so upon request,¹²⁸ or Muslims’ attending the wedding ceremony of fellow *zimmi*s and playing with them traditional (non-Muslim) dances¹²⁹. In the first case Abdurrahim Efendi ruled that apostacy regulations should

¹²⁶ Dimitrov, S., “Skritoto Hristianstvo i islyamizatsionnite protsesi v Osmanskata darzhava” (Cryptochristianity and the Islamisation Processes in the Ottoman State), *Istoricheski Pregled*, 1987, No. 3, p. 20.

¹²⁷ Hallaq, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

¹²⁸ Abdurrahim Efendi, *Fetawa-i Abdurrahim*, Der-i Saadet, 1243, p. 70, No. 4.

¹²⁹ Çatalcalı Ali Efendi, *Fetawa-i Ali*. P. 167, No.1.

be put in practice, and in the second Ali Efendi gave an answer to the effect that the Muslims who had engaged in the such practices should have their faith and marriage “renewed”. Such *fetvas* show that Islamic legal tradition expressed a marked concern in respect to Islam’s followers’ religious integrity and loyalty to the faith, as well as to any violations of the established Islamic rules of social behavior. It should be noted however, that in this respect Islam does not constitute an exception as compared to other monotheistic religious doctrines (namely Judaism and Christianity). There were also *fetvas* aimed at preventing a recent convert from being harassed by fellow *zimmi*s,¹³⁰ and such that reprimanded (*ta’zir*) for Muslims who approved of Christian mores and religious holidays.¹³¹ Similarly, there exist *fetvas* recommending death to a *zimmi* who has insulted the prophet Mohammed.¹³²

Such postulates of Islamic legal thought are far from enough, however, to give sufficient grounds to authors like S. Dimitrov to contend that “it is an indisputable fact that Islam was being spread by force and that the imposition of Islam was the work of the Ottoman state”.¹³³ Assuming that the empire possessed sufficient military and administrative potential to suppress such phenomena (if it really deemed this indispensable), the persistent existence of cryptochristianity well into the 19th c. is an indication, by itself, that the Ottoman state was not much concerned with the existence of double believers. S. Dimitrov, probably failing to distinguish between Islamic tradition and *caesaropapism* that was characteristic of the Orthodox Christian world, also makes the rather blatant assumption that “ the Muslim clergy was subordinate to the Ottoman state”, and thus, the latter was somehow in control of the

¹³⁰ Dimitrov, S., “Fetvi za izkorenyavane...”, p. 31.

¹³¹ Abdurrahim, *Fetawa*, p. 97, No. 6.

¹³² Ibid., p. 99, No. 2.

¹³³ Dimitrov, S., “Skritoto hristianstvo”, p. 19.

development of Islamic legal thought.¹³⁴ One should also bear in mind that *fetvas* had advisory and non-binding character. They could prompt and facilitate due legal action, but as the texts of *fetvas* addressing conversion and apostacy reveal, related issues occurred and were dealt with at the communal level.

Proselytism had always existed at the communal level and it was considered a laudable deed on behalf of a Muslim to help bring somebody into the right path. This was especially valid for life in the cities where interaction between local *zimmi* and Muslim communities was more intensive and these communities were, often mixed to a considerable extent. Excerpts from Sofia *kadı* court records reveal that there were a lot of cases in which Muslim *zimmis* and new Muslims lived next to each other and engaged in the purchase and sale of real estate property among each other.¹³⁵ “Three *fetvas* of the Şeyhülislam Ebussud take for granted that *zimmis* live adjacent to Muslims but preclude them from living immediately adjacent to mosques”.¹³⁶

It was fairly normal for a Muslim to manumit a slave who had converted. *Fetvas* show that there obviously were cases in which members of the local Muslim community were prone to induce local *zimmis* to accept Islam. Certain *fetvas* sanction the use of deceit on behalf of Muslims to lure a *zimmi* into converting,¹³⁷ and another considers acceptable conversion under the influence of alcohol and rules forcible bringing back to Islam an apostate who has converted under such conditions.¹³⁸ Still even such *fetvas* do not indicate that forcible conversion to Islam was explicitly sanctioned by Islamic law. Force was in fact employed in the case of apostacy, which is, however, a situation essentially different from conversion itself. Such were the cases of a number of Christian neo-martyrs of whom we know through Orthodox

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

¹³⁵ *Fontes Tircici Historiae Bulgaricae*, vol. 6, pp. 272, 278, 282.

¹³⁶ Jennings, R, “Zimmis in Ottoman Records”, p. 280.

¹³⁷ Abdurrahim, *Fetawa*, p.72, No. 8.

Christian hagiographic literature. In such cases, after conversion the convert became subject to intense pressure from the local Christian community to revoke his conversion, and consequently was the victim of harassment of local Muslim zealots. Historians from the Balkans have often incorrectly viewed such cases as related to forcible Islamisation, failing to distinguish between conversion and bringing back to Islam after an act of apostacy.

That members of the local Muslim community, as well as the central authorities did not always find new converts to be trustworthy members of the Muslim community is revealed in a *firman* of Ahmed III to the *kadı* of Selanik. In this document it is reported of misuse of power at a fairly low level, on behalf of the chief court attendant of the local *kadı* court, a certain Ishak, a recent convert who tried to help two female apostates escape from the local prison where they had been thrown in accordance with the prescriptions of Hanefi law with regard to such cases. Besides, the *firman* discloses that Ishak had appointed a relative of his, Mahmud, another recent convert, to the position of chief turnkey of the local prison, who also took part in the affair. The decree ends with an order to the effect that converts as well as their children be no more appointed to the offices of chief court attendant and chief turnkey of the local prison, but these positions be reserved for “trustworthy and pious” people.¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that although, such posts were not that high in the empire as a whole, they were rather significant at the local level, moreover in the case presented above all that happened in one of the largest cities of the Ottoman Balkans.

What this document shows once more is that conversion to Islam did not mean by no means severing of the convert’s relations with the *zimmi* community, for whose members it was not obviously abnormal to seek help from recent converts. This is

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 72, No. 1.

¹³⁹ Petrov, P. *Po sledite na nasiliето*, pp. 30-31.

further reinforced by the fact that *zimmis* often asked local converts to testify to their advantage in court cases against Muslims (as non-Muslims were not allowed to act as witnesses against Muslims).¹⁴⁰ Thus, evidence reveals that converts, especially in the cities, occupied a middle position between the local Muslim and *zimmi* communities acting as intermediaries between the two, taking advantage of their new social status to attain significant posts, and sometimes enjoying the disdain of the Muslims.

¹⁴⁰ Jennings, R., "Zimmis (non-Muslims) in Early 17th c. Ottoman Judicial Records", p. 257.

Conclusion

The present study had taken up the task to discuss certain aspects of Balkan Islamisation, in the light of petitions for conversion to Islam in combination with other supporting primary sources.

The above discussed petitions for the conversion of Islam suggest that Islamisation was as a gradual process conditioned by various factors, that predisposed, or rather pressed new converts to take, at least officially the “Islamic path”. Conversion was obviously seen by many non-Muslims an effective and secure way to financial alleviation and social advancement. The opportunity to practice secretly one’s previous religion while at the same time enjoying the fiscal and social advantages which the status of a Muslim offered, together with the integrating role of the Sufi orders made it a lot easier for non-Muslim to make a “compromise” and convert to Islam.

In the specific context of the petitions discussed above fiscal pressure and the quest for social advancement should have played a prominent role, as new convert did not necessarily have to go to Istanbul to convert, but used this as an opportunity to seek certain economic and social advantages. This could be viewed as a form of adaptation to the changing political and socio-economic conditions in the empire in the second half of the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries. During this period, Ottoman state and society underwent profound changes in respect to the composition of its elites. The degree of social mobility had increased significantly, and the boundaries among the various social orders, strictly outlined before were blurred and the *devşirme* system withered. Together with this, the Ottoman Balkan provinces had long ago ceased to be border lands, where the Ottomans used to confer a number of concessions and privileges to the local non-Muslim population at the time of the

conquest, and during the period the petitions refer to, being a Muslim constituted a fundamental condition for social advancement.

The above presented documents date from the second half of 17th century onwards, i.e. fall into during this period of definitive transformation – when the *devşirme* system withered and the fiscal burden upon non-Muslims (and Muslim *reaya*, in fact) increased significantly. Thus it appears easy to relate conversion (with the motives outlined in the above-presented *arzuhal*s) to the changing political and socio-economic situation of the Empire in the context of its decline. It remains a challenge for future research, however, to explore existing Ottoman archival collections in search of more, and more importantly earlier documents of this type (if they exist) to explore motivation patterns of Islamisation before the evident pressures of decline ever appeared.

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Appendix

(transliteration of selected documents)

Document 1

NBKM, OAK 76/52, f 19.

Devletlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu kulları Eflak oğullardan olub şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmak için huzur-u saadete geldim merhameten kisve virilmek babında merhametleri rica olunur. Baki ferman sultanımındır.

Bende nev müslim.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mu'tad üzere bir nefere kisve bahası virile. Buyuruldu.

5 Rebiü'l-evvel 1097 (30. 01. 1686)

Document 2

NBKM, OAK, 76/52, f. 61 (1097AH/1686AD)

Devletlü ve saadetlü Sultanım Hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu cariyeniz iki masumu ile şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmak için haki payı şerife geldik mercudurki merhamet olunub kisvemiz sadaka ü ihsan olunmak babında inayet şerifiniz rica olunur. Ferman sultanımındır.

Bende, nev müslim

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mu'tad üzere bir nefer nev müsleme ile iki evlada kisve virile. Buyuruldu.

4 Rebiü'l-ahir 1097 (28.02.1686).

Dokument 3

NBKM, OAK 76/52, f. 67.

Saadetlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu kulları azatlarından olub şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmağa huzur-u izzete geldim merhameten ve mürur eylemeleri rica olunur. Baki ferman sultanımındır.

Bende

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mu'tad üzere bir nefere kisve bahası virile. Buyuruldu.

8 Cemaziü'l-evvel 1097 (02.04.1686).

Document 4

NBKM, OAK 76/52, f. 74.

Saadetlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Manastır'dan Bulgar oğlu olub şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmağa geldim merhameten kisve virilmek rica olunur. Baki ferman sultanımındır.

Bende, nev müslim.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mu'tad üzere bir nefere kisve virile. Buyuruldu.

9 cemaziü'l-evvel 1097 (03.04. 1686).

Document 5

NBKM, F. 145, 108.

Saadetlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Yanbolu'dan Bulgar oğlu olub ve iki kar¹ındaşlarım İslam'a gelmiştir bu kulları dahi Şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmak için huzur-u izzete geldim merhameten kisve virilmek rica olunur. Baki ferman sultanımındır.

Bende, nev müslim.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mu'tad üzere bir nev mülsim-i sagire kisvesi virilmek. Buyuruldu.

9 Cemaziü'l-evvel 1097 (03.04.1686).

Document 6

NBKM, CG 34/2, f.3

Devletlü ve saadetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu kullarına ilham-ı rabani^{olub} ~~murur-ı saadet ki~~ şeref-i islam ile müşerref olmağa ^{huzur-ı saadeti nize} geldim kanun üzere kisvet ü ihsan ve dergah-ı Ali yeniçerileri emrine ilhak eylemek niyaz olunur ferman sultan cerrahlar kerhanesine ilhak olunmak babında.

Bende Ahmed.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Yalnız bir nefere mu'tad üzere kisve virile. Buyuruldu.

5 Cemaziü'l-evvel 1116 (05.09. 1704).

Document 7

CG 34/2, f.6.

Devletlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu kulları şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmak isteriz. Sultandan mercudurki yeniçeri ocağına çırağ ve kanun üzere bu iki nefer kullarına yeniçeri kisvesini ihsan buyurulmak babında emr ü ferman sultanımızındır.

Bende, iki nefer nev müslim.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Yalnız iki nefer mu'tad üzere kisve virilesiz. Buyuruldu.

9 cemaziü'l-evvel 1116 (09. 09. 1704)

Document 8

NBKM, CG 34/2, f. 2/

Devletlü saadetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu kulları şeref-i İslam ile müşerref olmak isterim. Kanun üzere kisvem ve iki yüz guruş kadar dahi deynim olmakla merhameten buyurulub deynim eda olacak kadar ihsan keremleri rica olunur. Emr ü ferman merhametlü sultanımıdır.

Bende.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Kanun üzere bir nefere kisve virile. Buyuruldu.

28 Receb 1116 (26.11.1704).

Document 9

NBKM, NPTA XX 1/28, f.23.

Devletlü ve mürüvvetlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Rikab-i hümayun önünde İslam ile müşerref olub devamlü saltanatımın rica olunurki cebehane ocağına çırak buyurub kanun üzere mükemmel kisve ve sadaka ile mürur buyurulmak babında ferman.

Bende nev müslim.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mucebince kanun üzere bir nefere kisve virilmek. Buyuruldu.

29 Şaban 1118 (16. 12. 1706).

Document 10

NBKM, 1 A, 57348, f.1.

Devletlü ve merhametlü Sultanım hazretleri sağ olsun.

Bu iki nefer kulları Kumaniçeli olub kalbimiz tulu' itmekle müşerref olmak içün haki payı saadete hal idüb geldik. Mercudurki kanun üzere iki nefere kisve bahalarımız virilmek babında ferman-ı ali rica olunur ferman sultamınızdır.

Bende, iki nev müslim kulları.

Resolution of the Grand Vizier:

Mucebince iki nefer nev müslim kisve bahası virilmek. Buyuruldu.

14 Safer 1143 (29. 08. 1730)

Resolution of the Başdefterdar:

Tezkiresi virile

Notification of the Başmuhasebe:

Tezkire dade.

19 Safer 1143 (03. 09. 1730).

Doc. 1

OAK 46/52, u. 19

مفتی محمد رفیع الرحمن
نفع کوٹوالی
۹۷

معدن و روتو سلطانی مفتی محمد رفیع الرحمن
بوفولہ لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ
مشوق زوی لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ لفللہ
کشور و ملک بینہ مرصداہ رب الاغور باؤ
فناہ کھارکھ
نوسل

مجلس وزراء بریتانیا
 منبر الیوم
 ۹۷

و نورو و عورتو
 بوجاری کز ایکه موضوع ایله شروع و السلام ایله شروع
 اولموش لایق مع خاکپاس نرینه کلد که مرعوبور کی و محمد و احمد
 کسره مرصده و طبعش اوچون بینر عینر نرینه کلد زرا
 اوچور فناء کلدنر
 نویم

OAK 76/52, A. 67

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مستادیند و نیزه کوه کوه
۱۶۵۹

معدن و زونو سراج موزین و زونو
بوفولتی از ایلیند او و یک شوق و لایله شوق او کوه
موضد غزنه کلام مرگه کوه و دیو و سرور المای
رجا و موزین و کلامه

OKL 76/52, u. 74

محکمہ انفک و نفوذ کوئی
میں

سدرنو درونو
مدرسو اوفو
مستوفو بولغدارو غلامو ویدر شوق و لایمیلہ مشرور اوکو
ظلمہ مرموہ "کس و رکند و بال او ویزا و باہ کدکدہ
توفیق

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مصدر و مرو نو
سید و مرو نو
۹۵۶۹

مصدر و مرو نو
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کتابخانه
موزه
و مرکز اسناد
جمهوری اسلامی ایران

وقف سادات
موقوفه سادات اسد و میر اسد و اسرار اسرار
از زیر کسب و ادبیت خود و فرزند و بنیان و بنیان و بنیان
بیر بریر و بنیان و اسرار و اسرار و اسرار و اسرار
از عهد اسرار و اسرار و اسرار و اسرار و اسرار و اسرار

سید محمد...

کتابخانه عمومی
موزه ملی افغانستان

HPA 22 128.023

۱۱۹۱

وقتی که فرقه قزوکی در حین حمله به کابل
سکاینها و ده لویکها را بدست آوردند
و به کابل بردند و در آنجا در خانه ای پناه
گرفتند و در آنجا قاتلین را کشتند و کشته
شدند و در آنجا کشته شدند

موزه ملی افغانستان

فصل اول

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 في حق الله تعالى
 كتاب الصلاة
 سنة ١٢٤٢
 ١١

ووضو وركعتين
 بود یک نفر و در نماز اول و دوم شروع به طبع قلبین طلوع آسمان مشرق اولی
 رکوع هکذا بعد از شش رکعت اول و دوم رکوع هکذا بعد از شش رکعت اول و دوم
 نفر کسی هم از رکعت و رکعت بایست و رکعت بیست و یکم رکعت هکذا
 رکعت اول
 فقه